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NEW DIRECTIONS XI



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in prose and poetry

number eleven

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

These New Directions Annuals are published more or less annually. The editor will only consider contributions which are sent in with a stamped, self-addressed return envelope which fits. All of the earlier volumes are out of print except Number 7 (\$3.50) and Number 10 (\$4.50). However, many of the best pieces from the other volumes have been re-collected in the anthology *Spearhead* (\$5.00) which is available.

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*This volume of New Directions
is dedicated by its editor*

TO THE MEMORY OF

THEODORE SPENCER

POET - CRITIC - TEACHER

MUSICIAN - SCHOLAR - FRIEND

A C K N O W L E D G M E N T S

The Publisher wishes to express his thanks for kind permission to reprint the following selections: to the editors of: *Horizon* for "The Situation of the American Writer" by Stephen Spender; *Wake* for "Pages From Cold Point" by Paul Bowles and for three poems by William Carlos Williams; *Partisan Review* for "Rubio y Morena" by Tennessee Williams; *Poetry* for poems by Stanley Moss and William Jay Smith; *Portfolio* for "Iphigenia" by Kenneth Rexroth; and *Poetry Ireland* for poems by William Carlos Williams.

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LLOYD ALEXANDER was born in Philadelphia in 1924 and now lives in Drexel Hill, Pa. Discharged from the Army in Paris, he studied on a scholarship at the Sorbonne. In Paris he met Paul Eluard and with his help began a translation of Eluard's poems, soon to be published in a bi-lingual edition in New Directions' Selected Writings Series. New Directions has already published his translations of Jean-Paul Sartre's *The Wall* and *Nausea*.

JORGE LUIS BORGES, one of the leading poets of Latin America, was born in Buenos Aires in 1899. His grandmother was English but otherwise the family is Argentine, of Spanish origin. His father, a lawyer, did a translation of "Omar Khayyam." Borges studied in Switzerland and later in Spain, where he became associated with the advance-guard movement. Returning to the Argentine, he was active in literary reviews which created a ferment in Argentinian poetry, stimulating young writers to new forms of expression. Besides poetry, he has published criticism, stories, philosophical essays, translations (of such writers as André Gide, Kafka, Faulkner, Virginia Woolf), and edited anthologies of prose and verse.

ALAIN BOSQUET was born in Odessa in 1919 but spent his childhood in Belgium. He was still a student when the Germans invaded the country in 1940. Later he was in the Belgian and French Armies. In 1942 he came to America and became an American citizen. He is now with the American Army in Berlin, in the protocol section. Bosquet was assistant editor of the first Gaullist paper in America, *The Voice of France*, and was co-founder of the magazine *Hemispheres*. He has published four books of poetry in French.

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PAUL BOWLES' first novel *The Sheltering Sky*, published here by New Directions, in London by John Lehmann and in Paris by Gallimard, has proven to be one of the literary events of 1949. Bowles, who achieved success as a composer before he began to publish his writing, has had stories in leading literary magazines, and New Directions will bring out a collection of them next year. Bowles now lives, with his wife, the writer Jane Bowles, in the Arab quarter of Tangiers in North Africa. He likes, when he can, to make trips into the Sahara.

WILLIAM BURFORD hails from Texas and was graduated last year from Amherst. He is at work on a novel which will be published by Dodd, Mead & Co. His prose piece in this volume is excerpted from another novel which he wrote while in college. He was at Yaddo last summer.

CATHARINE CARVER was born in Ohio in 1921. She is now in New York doing free-lance editorial work. She has been on the staffs of *Partisan Review* and *The Hudson Review*.

ALLEN CHALMERS is a pseudonym for a well-known English writer, who appears under the same style in Christopher Isherwood's autobiographical novel, *Lions and Shadows*. Isherwood has kindly supplied the background for Chalmers' story in a note which precedes it in this volume.

BRENDA CHAMBERLAIN is a successful painter as well as a writer. She lives on the Isle of Bardsey off the coast of Wales. A group of her poems were included in the anthology *New British Poets*.

ALBERT COOK, presently a Junior Fellow at Harvard, his alma mater, was born in New Hampshire. He was an editor of *Halcyon* and has contributed to *Tiger's Eye*, *Poetry* and *Partisan Review*. His *The Dark Voyage and the Golden Mean*, a philosophy of comedy, was published this year by The Harvard University Press. He is now finishing a novel, *The Unfamiliar Name*, and a book of poems. His verse translation of *Oedipus Rex* was produced by the Tributary Theatre of Boston last year.

FRANCES COTTON attended Swarthmore College and subsequently did editorial work and wrote advertising copy in New

York. She married in 1945 and now lives in St. Johnsbury, Vermont, where she conducts a radio program on child care.

H. E. FENWAY's piece in this volume marks her first appearance in print. She is a young midwesterner.

EDWARD FIELD is a young American poet who, after a stay in Paris, is now living on an island off the coast of Greece. His poem in this book is his first publication, but others are scheduled to appear in various periodicals.

BERNARD FRECHTMANN lives in Paris, where he does translations from the leading contemporary French writers and acts as literary agent for a number of them. He plans to translate more books by Jean Genet.

JEAN GENET is the sensation of French literature today. He is about thirty years old and makes no bones about having spent a certain part of his life in French prisons and the Paris underworld. A protégé of Sartre and of Cocteau, he writes long prose books (their structure is too original to let them be termed novels), poetry and plays, two of which have been produced in Paris. His principal prose volumes are *Le Journal d'un Voleur*, *Le Miracle de la Rose*, *Querelle de Brest*, *Pompe Funebre* and *Notre Dame des Fleurs*. The last named has been translated into English by Bernard Frechtman and published in Paris by Paul Morihien. *The Tiger's Eye* recent'y featured an excerpt from this work.

AUDRIE GIRDNER was California born and raised, and graduated from San José State College, majoring in the social sciences. She is married and has a four-year-old daughter.

JOHN GOODWIN has lived in California and in Paris, but now in New York, where he recently had a show of his paintings at the Carlebach Gallery. His story *The Cocoon* was included by Martha Foley in her *Best American Short Stories* of 1947.

WILLIAM GOYEN served in the Navy during the war and then lived in Taos, New Mexico, where he built his own adobe house near that of Frieda Lawrence. At present he is in London, finishing a novel which will be published by Random House. He is also translating Albert Cosser's *The Lazy People in the Fertile Valley* for New Directions.

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TITO GUERRINI, born in Rome in 1924, has published his stories in various Italian newspapers and reviews, among them the well-known review *Fiera Letteraria*. Guerrini has a growing reputation in Rome as a theatrical and motion picture critic. It is in the latter field that he has allied himself with the younger generation of writers and artists who are making of post-war Italy one of the exciting cultural centers in Europe.

JOHN HAWKES is a student at Harvard. His first novel, *The Cannibal*, is being published this season by New Directions, with an introduction by Albert J. Guerard. He is married and works part-time at The Harvard University Press. He served as one of the editors of *Wake*.

EDWIN HONIG is thirty years old and a member of the English Department at Harvard. He is the author of the volume on Lorca in The Makers of Modern Literature Series, a book of poems, *The Moral Circus*, and has published stories and verse in the literary magazines for the past ten years. He won a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1948, and is now working on a book on allegory and epic.

KATUE KITASONO has been for many years the leading spirit of the Vou Club, a group of poets in Japan who opened their minds to European and American literary influences. Work of his group first appeared here in *New Directions* 1938 and Kitasono reciprocated with translations of many American poets in his magazines *Vou* and *Cendres*. We are so glad to be in touch with him and his friends again after the lapse of the war.

IRWIN KROENING was born in 1916 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. He studied at the University of Wisconsin where he specialized in psychology. He is now preparing a novel. Another of his pieces was published in *New Directions* X last year.

ROBERT LOWRY's third novel, *The Big Cage*, was published recently by Doubleday. It is the story of a young man who from childhood was determined to become a writer. His other principal books: *Casualty* (a novel about American soldiers in Italy, published by New Directions), *Find Me in Fire* (a novel with a midwestern setting), and *The Wolf That Fed Us* (a collection of stories). Ernest Hemingway has called him "one of the best young American writers." Since the war, Lowry has lived in Brooklyn, in Michigan and (for almost a year) in Italy. He

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was born in 1919 in Cincinnati, Ohio; is married (for the second time); is spending the winter in Connecticut.

HAROLD GRIER McCURDY is an associate professor of psychology at the University of North Carolina. A small book of his poems, *A Straw Flute*, was published in 1946.

WILLARD MAAS teaches contemporary literature and creative writing at Long Island University. He is the author of two books of verse, *Fire Testament* and *Concerning the Young*, and is preparing a third volume entitled *The Long Arm of Love*. His experimental film, "Geography of the Body," with poetic commentary by George Barker, has just been released by Cinema 16. He lives in Brooklyn.

SHERRY MANGAN was formerly a European correspondent for the Luce publications. He makes Paris his headquarters but travels a great deal, and is planning an extended visit to South America. Before moving to Europe he lived in Boston and edited the little magazine *Larus*. His last appearance in *New Directions* was in 1939.

JOHN F. MATHEWS was formerly technical director of the Fort Wayne Civic Theater. He did graduate work in philosophy at the University of Cincinnati and spent ten years in radio as actor, writer and producer. Later he entered advertising, wrote 1500 singing commercials, then exited to Hollywood. He is currently a New Yorker and lectures on playwriting at City College and Erwin Piscator's Dramatic Workshop. His first play won the Arts of the Theater Foundation Award for 1948.

JANE MAYHALL was born in Louisville, Kentucky, and attended Black Mountain College in North Carolina, majoring in music. She also studied singing in Boston and New York. Now living in New York City, she writes fiction and poems which appear in the better reviews. She is working on a novel and sings occasionally over WNYC. Her short stories have been reprinted in *The Best American Short Stories*, 1947 and 1949.

After living for many years in Paris, HENRY MILLER has settled down on a hillside above the Pacific at Big Sur, California. He was born in New York City on December 26, 1891. The publication of his *Tropic of Cancer* by the Obelisk Press in Paris

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was the beginning of his worldwide recognition as one of the most significant writers of the century. Since then he has written many books, and *New Directions* has published the following ones, all of which are in print: *The Cosmological Eye*, *The Wisdom of the Heart*, *Sunday After The War*, *The Air Conditioned Nightmare*, *The Colossus of Maroussi* (about modern Greece) and *Remember to Remember*. The first two volumes of Miller's magnum opus, *The Rosy Crucifixion*, have just appeared in Paris. The first part of his study of Rimbaud was included in *New Directions IX*.

STANLEY MOSS was born in Woodhaven, New York, in 1925. He was educated at Ohio University, Trinity College, Columbia and Yale. During the war he served in the U. S. Navy. After spending some time in Europe he joined the staff of *New Directions*.

MARCIA NARDI lives in the country not far from New York. A group of her poems were included in *New Directions* 1942. She hopes to have a book of verse ready for publication soon.

LORINE NIEDECKER had poems in the first volume of *New Directions*, back in 1936, and has published with us several times since. She lives in Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin.

DUNCAN PHILLIPS is director of The Phillips Memorial Gallery in Washington, one of the outstanding collections of modern art in the world. Although he is best known for his work on contemporary painters, he has also written on the old masters, notably a book length study of Giorgione. His most recent publication is an essay on Bonnard in *The Kenyon Review*. The Dove paintings which illustrate his article are in the Phillips Gallery collection. He was one of the first critics to recognize Dove's genius and was a patron of the artist for many years.

KENNETH REXROTH, poet and abstract painter, was born in Indiana in 1915. He has published four books of poetry, the latest of which is *The Signature of All Things* (*New Directions*). He edited the *New British Poets* anthology for *New Directions*, and did introductions for Herbert Read's *The Green Child* and *The Selected Poems of D. H. Lawrence*. Rexroth has done verse translations from oriental and classical languages.

His home is in San Francisco, but at present he is in Europe on a Guggenheim Fellowship. His *Iphigenia*, which first appeared in Caresse Crosby's *Portfolio*, is the middle piece of a trilogy, of which the first dance play, *Phaedra*, was published in *New Directions IX*.

LYNETTE ROBERTS is one of the leaders of the Welsh literary movement and lives in Llanyrbi near Carmarthen. Her *Poems* were published some years ago by Faber & Faber, and she has recently completed an historical novel about 12th Century Wales and a long heroic poem of 175 stanzas.

HOWARD SERGEANT lives in London and edits the magazine *Outposts*. He has produced poetry programs for the B.B.C., and edited no less than five different anthologies. His book of verse, *The Leavening Air*, was published in 1946.

JOSEPH SHORE is working for an M.A. degree in Dramatic Arts at Columbia University, where he wrote and composed *Dance Rex*, a play about the arrival of the Yellow Emperor of Nostradamus. As a member of the famous D7C1 Detachment in the last war, he was awarded a medal for heroic action. His work has appeared in Mayorga's *Best One-Act Plays* for three consecutive years, in *Esquire*, *New Directions* 1940, *Story*, and other periodicals.

WILLIAM JAY SMITH was born in Louisiana in 1918, and has been living for the past year in Florence, Italy. During the war he was a liaison officer with the French Navy, and afterwards a Rhodes scholar at Oxford. His *Poems* were published by The Banyan Press in 1947; he is now at work on a new collection. The Black Sun Press in Paris will publish his translation of *The Clowns* by Jules Laforgue in the spring.

CLAUDIO SOLAR teaches Spanish at the Rural Normal School in Victoria, Chile. WARREN CARRIER, Solar's translator, is a young American teacher and novelist.

It is rumored that STEPHEN SPENDER will return to the United States this winter for a lecture tour. He taught last year at Sarah Lawrence College, and spoke at the Goethe Festival in Aspen, Colorado, this past summer, before going to Italy. He is the author of more than a score of books—poetry, fiction, essays, travel, plays and translations—the most recent being a volume

of verse, *The Edge of Being*, with Random House. He was a member of the preparatory commission for UNESCO and has been active in international literary groups.

MAY SWENSON has been "writing involuntarily since the age of 13—an insidious practice that has finally become chronic." She was born of Mormon parents in 1913, in Logan, Utah, where her father is a professor at the State Agricultural College. For a while she worked on the Salt Lake City *Deseret News*, and then came to New York City, where she now lives.

UEDA TOSHIO was born in 1900 and graduated from Keio University in 1927. He is a member of The Vou Club and published a book, *Movement of Hypothesis*, in 1929.

PETER VIERECK, who won the Pulitzer Prize in poetry last year with his book *Terror and Decorum*, teaches at Smith College. He is an historian and has just published a book on the theory of conservatism. Viereck has recently played a part in the controversy raging in *The Saturday Review* over the Pound case, the New Criticism movement and the influence of Eliot on modern poetry. The position he has taken is one which has caused much regret to his friends at New Directions. But we respect his right to his opinions, though hoping very much that time will change them.

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS has returned from his long sojourn in Italy and plans to spend the winter in Key West, working on a new play and such stories and poems as come into his head while he is doing it. He went out to Hollywood for a few weeks and tried to keep the script of *The Glass Menagerie* from being desecrated in the approved Hollywood fashion. The extent of his success remains to be seen. *A Streetcar Named Desire* which is now playing in London and Paris as well as New York and the road, will also be made into a film. A volume of Williams' poetry is in the offing with New Directions, as well as a limited edition of his one-act play about the death of D. H. Lawrence, which will be printed at The Cummington Press.

Now that his son Bill is helping him with his medical practice in Rutherford, New Jersey, WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS is able to give more time to his writing—to the delight of his ardently admiring readers. Several projects are on the

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fire, including Part IV of *Paterson* (Part III will be released by New Directions in December), a sequel to the novels *White Mule* and *In The Money*, and more chapters in the autobiography which has been serialized sporadically in *Poetry*. The good doctor's play, *A Dream of Love*, was successfully produced by one of the little theatres in New York last summer, his *Selected Poems* came out in The New Classics Series with an introduction by Randall Jarrell, and a book about him by Vivienne Koch will soon be released in The Makers of Modern Literature Series. All in all, a busy year. And he was elected a Fellow in Literature of The Library of Congress, too.

EDITOR'S NOTES

I AM especially grateful to Stephen Spender for giving me permission to reprint in this number of *New Directions* the article which he published in *Horizon* on the situation of the American writer. Not only is this the best essay that has been written on this very crucial subject, but it spares me the trouble of having to repeat again this year my annual complaint about the state of affairs prevailing in our American literary culture. Mr. Spender says so many of the things which are constantly on my mind with so much more fluency and authority than I can ever muster. And it is reassuring to know that an outsider discovers the same defects which we on the inside deplore.

There are also certain other documents which the student of this question should examine, for correlation with Mr. Spender's thesis. First of all, there is James T. Farrell's *The Fate of Writing in America*, the pamphlet which we published some years ago and which is still in print. Time has brought nothing to disprove Mr. Farrell's analysis of the bad effects of big-business economics on publishing. The background he supplies is basic. For the inside of Mr. Farrell's outside, I recommend an article by Mr. J. K. Lasser which appeared a few weeks ago (late October) in *The Saturday Review of Literature*. Mr. Lasser is accountant for a number of the big New York publishing houses and he knows what he is talking about. His point of view is strictly commercial, and when he says there is a fly in the ointment you can really be sure that it's horse-fly size. Mr. Lasser maintains that with present costs the commercial houses can't make ends meet on their publication of new books, no matter how strongly slanted to the mass market. And if the gentry who are deliberately out to make money can't do it, how much less can the publisher who wants to publish "literature." We get a good idea of this predicament from a symposium published this fall in *Poetry* on the economics of poetry publishing. A lot of ground is covered by the four experts who contribute to this bull-session, but the gist of it is this: good poetry can only be published in three ways: 1) by the publishers who do their own printing at night while they support themselves on a job; 2) by publishers who can afford to take the loss, or who are willing to take it for the sake of prestige or in order to "get at" the poet's fiction; 3) by grants from a Foundation. Hypothesis 3 is still more or less in the future. Several of the Foundations are

showing their worth now by helping some of the good little magazines, but as yet, except that the Guggenheims have always helped poets to live while writing, the Foundations have not come to direct subsidization of poetry books. But it seems likely they will be obliged to before very long.

Mr. Spender puts his finger right on the crucial spot when he says that America needs to develop a reading public "not so large as to swamp all taste and judgment, and not so small as to be unable to support new writers to the extent that they are able to earn a livelihood from writing." There you have it. And how are you going to get it? Goodness knows we have the potential readers—our countless universities and colleges are grinding them out every year in increasing thousands. Why don't they keep up in later life the interest in reading literature with which they have been inoculated in school? Why do they fall so easily for the kind of not-quite-the-real-thing writing which is put out by the book clubs and magazines of the *Atlantic-Harpers* category? This to me is the tragic thing: that so many are so near and yet so far. When you put a serious novel into the hands of one of these border-line readers he likes it more often than not. But he doesn't seem to have the proper apparatus for selection. He will drop back into the next-best the following week without a murmur. Something must be added which will magnetize him, so to speak, make him know the difference when he feels it and then value the difference when he understands it.

One thing which would help enormously would be a reliable literary weekly, one which would provide criticism and guidance on the level found in the good little magazines or in the columns of the London *New Statesman & Nation*. I often think that if we could borrow a critic like V. S. Pritchett for a few years and find the money to put him into circulation every week we would soon see an élite reading public take shape. What is it that Pritchett has that Edmund Wilson doesn't? Apparently, a vast amount of energy. He writes a longish essay-review in *The New Statesman* practically every week, while Wilson only favors us with one every other month. What is the value of these frequent appearances? They give the reader a constant standard to judge by. He can agree or disagree with Pritchett after he has read the book under discussion, but he knows all the time what is measuring for him, and that the measure is a first-rate critical mind.

Sometimes I have a wonderful dream that goes like this. I dream that in a marvelous country called not-U.S.-land the di-

rector of a large charitable and educational Foundation gives an earnest young magazine editor (and I *don't* mean myself) enough money to put out a small weekly review sheet for three years and to pay critics like Wilson and Trilling and Levin and Kazin and Fitts and a dozen more of that calibre to write a review every other week. The subsidy would carry the stipulation that no advertising would be accepted until the paper had become so successful that there would be no temptation to fix or even sugar a review to get it. Just think what such a review could do! Once and for all it would separate the sheep from the goats in American writing and publishing. Readers could be confident that here they would really be told what was the best—not what the most-est people were reading, but what were the best books being published. A year or two of that kind of leadership and you would surely begin to see an integrated reading public for serious literature. I'm convinced of it. We have the potential readers—by the thousands. It's a question of making them conscious and getting their purchasing power channeled. As things now are, the publishers' exaggerated advertisements and the puff-&-blow reviews in the book sections give them no real help in discovering the best. Most of what they buy labelled literature is nothing but hackrap; so they lose interest, and confidence in the purveyors. A review such as I have described could restore interest and build confidence. I know it. . . . But of course that is only a dream. It won't happen here.

At least, it will never happen here from a commercial start. That has been tried and always failed. I may be over-charitable, but I credit the publishers and editors of *The Saturday Review* with having had good intentions. I think they wanted to do the kind of job I have suggested, but found it wouldn't pay off. Printing is just too expensive nowadays. And you can't expect the best critics to write for you week in week out unless you can pay them enough so they can afford to teach fewer classes in the colleges where they work for their livings. I haven't asked them, but I suspect that the *Saturday Review* people found that they *had* to drag in politics and "ideas" and even phonograph records to keep afloat. The advertising from quality publishing wasn't sufficient to carry the load. And so they embarked on a policy of trying to stir up mass reader interest which culminated in the disgusting affair of the Hillyer attack on Pound, Eliot and the New Criticism.

I am spared the necessity of writing at length about the Hillyer case (and I think that "case" is the right word here)

through the knowledge that a fully documented reply to Hillyer's absurd allegations and sour-grape carping has been prepared by the Fellows in Literature of the Library of Congress and will soon be published as a pamphlet by *Poetry Magazine*, 232 East Erie Street, Chicago. I give the address because I hope everyone interested in justice will write for a copy and give it the widest possible circulation. I understand only too well the kind of economic pressure which has led the editors of *The Saturday Review* to chase the rainbow of circulation-through-controversy, and I can sympathize with that, but I cannot forgive them their breach of taste and responsibility in turning over the Pound article (and of course there was in the Bollingen Award a reasonable subject for a *reasonable* article) to a writer whose personal passions and jealousy so obviously disqualified him as an impartial arbiter. Pound, in his pitiable illness, may have committed technical treason against his country—I say “technical” because there was clearly no conscious, moral treason involved; he prefaced each of his broadcasts with the declaration that he was speaking according to the dictates of conscience of an American citizen attempting to “save the U. S. Constitution”—an idea which may seem laughable to us, girded up as we are with the safety of our position, but which was nonetheless real to him in his alienated inner world. . . . Pound, I say, may have been unwittingly a traitor to his country, but these others—Hillyer and those responsible for broadcasting his outburst—were consciously, morally and willfully traitors to the homeland of the poets, the country of all those who worship at the shrine of the true Apollo. I do not question their right to dislike Pound's poetry or Eliot's essays. I call them out for substituting smear tactics and hysterical denigration for criticism.

Now while I have the axe out, let me use it a bit on two other matters which have been annoying me these past several years.

First of all, there is the U. S. copyright law. It is a farce, and it ought to be changed forthwith. Most readers suppose that the copyright law is for the protection of authors. What a laughable idea! The copyright law is for the protection of American printers. Let me give you an example. If an American citizen prints his own book of poems in a foreign land (and many are being driven to it by the high costs at home) he cannot copyright his book in the USA and thereby obtain protection in his own country. Copyright will only be granted for a book printed and bound within the United States. Can you tie that? In addition,

there are many small technicalities in the process of registration which are confusing and obsolete. Books sometimes lose copyright protection through an unintentional clerical error. The law should be re-written to give American citizens protection in their own country no matter where their books are printed, and so that the letter is flexible to the spirit.

Then there is the Critical Permissions Racket. If we have a poorly thriving literary criticism in this country, one reason is the Critical Permissions Racket. If a critic writes a critical study of an author, he naturally needs to quote quite a bit from that author's work. But when he asks permission from the author's publisher to use these citations, nine times out of ten he will get a whopping bill for the privilege. I had to do with one case where the permission fees demanded were four times the critic's possible royalties from the sale of the entire first printing of his book. Naturally a situation like this discourages literary criticism. And it is extremely short-sighted too; good critical books help to build up the reading public for quality literature. But since critics have no union to stand up for their rights the publishers victimize them continually on this score. Mind you, I am not talking about antho'ogy permissions. That is a different story. An anthologist should pay for the use of another man's poems—always and in full measure. I am speaking simply of quotations from an author's work necessary to illustrate a critical point about him in a serious work of literary criticism. Think it over.

Well, I feel better. It helps to get these things out of my system. Now what can I say that is sweetness and light, cheerful and forward-looking? Something to leave a better taste in the mouth. I guess I can say that we have some mighty interesting exhibits here this year in our gallery-book. There is great variety here and there is a feeling of excitement and of movement. What you find may not be the best work being written today—much of the best is in conventional forms and so has no place in this specialized collection—but it is at least proof that bad as things are in our literary culture you still can't keep the young folk, and some of the old folk who feel young, down. All the Hillyers in the world can't keep them from believing that poetry is the thing that matters in life and trying to find new ways to write it and live it.

J. Laughlin

NEW DIRECTIONS XI

AN ARDUOUS GOOD

H. E. Fenway

"JENNY SMITH with the dark red hair," Jenny Smith sang, "Jenny Smith with the sad brown eyes." She stopped and smiled. Whatever possessed her to make up such a song! It didn't suit her in the least, it belonged to a young, fresh highland lass and well, she was nearing forty and hadn't really looked at herself as she did now for perhaps fifteen-odd years. Besides, she couldn't go any further—her nose was the next line, she thought, and while it was quite acceptable, it wasn't the kind of nose you could be lirting about. "Of course," she spoke out loud, "you could skip the nose as the ballads do"—but then the mouth wasn't a ballad mouth at all. Never mind. But it was interesting to think that if it hadn't been for the nose, her face might have been too soft for living and teaching the higher discipline. Discipline, discipline—the sibilant stroke broke sharp against her mind, then fell away gently as the unimpacted wave. She felt in an almost physical way the wheels of her brain slowing up, taking their rhythm from the painful music of the word. She had a fleeting premonition that gaiety was gone and that her being was set again to its accustomed pace. Discipline—oh the beauty of it! (tying her shoe) not ruler or rod, but a white bird lifting with strong beak the fruit of life, not breaking but piercing, sipping slowly the pain in the pleasure and choosing freely to know and to bear. The great lesson that was—yes, of the old philosophers and the poets and the men of nobility like Dr. Burton, teacher, friend. Jenny Smith sighed his name over the gardenia she pinned onto her coat. When she turned off the light the massive noble head hung for a moment like a death mask over the bulb. Down the long hall it swayed, from light to light, leading her on, the severed symbol of a passing pageant, till she reached the elevator. She would remember him always. She turned from the elevator—no, not the elevator, the Hindu lady's veil, the shimmering braid

of the reticent Dane, the Frenchman's smooth queue of sugared *bon mots*, the cool grey train of the tweed and horn-rimmed pose, crazy tentacles to crush him. She took the stairway down.

Four flights; span, twenty years. The classroom in the funny corner of the building, the one no one could ever find, really exciting she had always found it, to get there day after day, a little hidden temple; Dr. Burton bent over the desk like an invocation; Peter Lynden smiling at her, eyes saying, "We're ready for the flight, poor others left behind"; she had named the uninspired students "poor others," oh what wild conceit; Peter to tease always used the phrase very solemnly. Peter Lynden, Jenny Smith, Peter Lynden, Jenny Smith. The sounds had swung an iridescent arc that first time she had seen their names listed on the school schedule. Still on the sweet bleak little schedule were their names. Now they seemed to be like two silver needles—meeting, light; retreating, darkness. She caught hold of the railing as if to dam the blood rushing to her face. No, no need to fear; how could he read it? By the sorrow of the adoration in her eyes? Their tapers might be lit for a million things that had ceased their struggle for life. Life (she seemed to stop short at sounds of words more than most) Who, and What, and Where? Let us say everything, and let it go at that. But we cannot. The uncountable all casts uncountable shadows. Shall we visit the market place? Oh yes, Life is there—in patchwork tatters, and in the bells of the jester. Beware, he will trip you up, pick your pockets, scatter your little hoard of goods. Catch him if you can. Surely he it was who pinched you indecently. And who else induced you into that silly wager? He clutters your way with dirty babies and blinds your eyes with striped awnings. He will make you drunk with the smell of oranges and violets and stale mackerel. Oh, it is bad for you if you have come in silent from a peak in Darien. "Sir," you say (when you catch him sitting cross-legged for a moment laconically biting into an apple with the relish that comes from anticipating digestion of a First Cause), "I beg you not to molest me; I am a stranger in these parts and have no business here. Surely you are an aristocrat, travelling incognito, and you will not take undue advantage. You are a peer, at home everywhere. I am not. Another time and another place, perhaps?" Oh, you *are* a fool, Jenny! Eve Lynden would never stop to bargain with such a one. She would run swashbuckling into the belly of Life, rip him wide open, and what if he came whole again? If you draw blood once, to do it again is easier—victory was partly a habit. Whimsy twisted a

screw. Jenny, Jenny, quite contrary, How do your shadows grow, she thought, and before the last word had found its resting place, she was conscious of having moved her lips.

And there, just a few feet away, in a chair of the vestibule leading to the exit sat one of the House's stocks-in-trade, an exotic, immobile girl. Drawing the loose strings of the past into taut control, Jenny passed her by with the impersonal dignity of a tourist comfortably impervious to the weighted mystery of an eastern idol. How unreasonable, Jenny thought, as she felt the rushing air, that the girl's face should not have been dispelled as a breath of incense, a stranger in no way impressive to her. Why should she seem a dim participant of those thoughts that had broken against her massed impassivity. Oh, but the answer was sure and simple! It was truth not fantasy. This girl and Eve shared a quality of spirit that had led her to a subtle identity. It was their power and her lack.

What was it—in words—to speak it. Words—isolative. Words—agglutinative. To help you. Terms to teach. But yours the barrier, the depths. Where were the fine-edged words to impale this blessed quality. Where were the thick-linked words to gather together its elements. It had something to do with "egoism," "individualism," "whole numbers." It was simply a sense of self, undoubting and unquestioning. The torment of it was that it was she, not the Eves of the world, she who studied and interpreted the molds of her thought and feeling, who pared and added and rearranged, it was she whose sense of identity should have been everpresent and indivisible. In spite of this, or was it because of it, after years consecrated to painstaking illumination of the spirit's dim manuscript, she had failed to achieve what Eve never strove for, a self consciousness clear and radiant and infallible as an angel's. It seemed to her that she perceived her essence and therefore her function with only that measure of knowledge which the blind attain whose hands, singling out the planes and curves of objects, cannot yet reach to the soul of their form.

Yet as always she heard the fluted voice of elation counterpointing this grim and worn bass. Was it not the inevitable price of art, of truth, this fluctuant sense of personal dispersion? Only art and truth were infinite; only the search for them mattered. But how, she asked impassionedly, should the strain of extension beyond the finite not sometimes spread to almost fatal thinness the body of self. It was the old goading question of the nature of Reality, and who could force its shape to a common mold? The smooth bright monolith that was Eve's mind was free from

the divine pain of great and multiple pressures; and, she thought in amused irony, her own pyramidal structure tended now and again to disarrange itself into—well, not a house to live in.

Eve and Peter, in all honesty, *did* have a house to live in. Yet Peter and she explored a world which, dynamic and boundless to them, figured with a bland certainty in Eve's mind as the harmless retreat of a devout, often lovable, but esoteric fellowship. But Peter (the smile was wan) had obviously not thought it the best of all possible worlds. Like the seemingly mortally wounded heroes of epics, the old pain rose and asserted itself. What had made that world not big, not real enough? They had loved it both; she knew he had found her perfect in the setting. And had they not known a spaciousness, a vividness of communion, exciting beyond anything academies could ever envisage.

How young of her it had been! She had moved in her domain as unconscious of the possibility of change as a pastoral shepherdess. And the possibility of its mattering to her, she was grateful, had not occurred to him. With severe fortitude she touched the point of difference. She had not been to him, as he to her, the symbol, but the interpreter of that world. Classic irony, profound paradox! She the voice issuing from the temple, unknown priestess, veiled, remote, key to the music but not the music, clue to the image but not the image, and (oh strange wrong reading of her meaning) Eve to him the tanager, the bright singing bird.

Yet (she threw back her head as if with some fierce sense of freedom) this knowledge, why was it not the ache, the rent that shattered—unless it were only the shell of truth, and not its living core; unless it were only a truth, but not the truth that mattered—and the truth that mattered, what was it but a wondrous marriage of lucidity and subtlety. It seemed to her that her mind had become a white cleared space whereon in dark and mystic splendor three figures interlocked in endless rhythms, vaulted reverently by the great archway of trees through which she passed, wildly solemnized by the autumn's scattered hoard of burning leaves. Through the pliant and changing forms of their mingled motion (oh, shadow-weaving reeds) she searched out with subtle care the roots, currents, lights that delimiting and patterning projected the infinite unique. Meeting, crossing, in all their difference, was it not the tremendous truth that their lines of being held each other fast at a center of singular beauty, a singular love for each other.

But for this, why was she plunging into the jungle of a dinner party where the fine stirrings of their intimacy must glide breath-

lessly between the footfalls of the hateful obvious. Not for herself surely (did she not see Peter every, every day), yet surely for herself. For Peter?—it would suppose acknowledgment of a need he hardly recognized, yet certainly for Peter. And yes, indubitably, for Eve. To see that was everything. As if she had touched a magic spring, an exquisite suspense engaged her being. From the dark chaos of division, words neglected (words of Eve, words of Peter fallen lonely, unplaced) stirred, rose, flew tremulously into pattern. As the reader of books, in an ardor of recognition, turns back, takes up, fastens to the strong central root of meaning the un-lived, the lustreless fragments and feels them quicken to new birth, so, in the rare full pulse of discovery, she retrieved from an indifferent soil the pale sights, lost sounds, re-told their nature, fixed them in fresh glory.

"It's an act of Providence that you'll be well enough to come," Eve had said with her customary crisp enthusiasm, and bobbing noiselessly about the room (how cool, how even the bars of light) setting up her just-right little gifts, the funny cactus and hand-painted water glass, a woven basket with an out-of-season fruit (how *did* she manage to get it?), she seemed veritably to be disposing offerings in some familiar ritual of thanks. In her dark red dress, with the almost feverish dark sheen of her skin, eyes, hair (black, luminous, triple-mirrored black), she resembled nothing so much, Jenny thought, as the representation of a live coal in a school play. "You'll put a stop to so much nonsense," Eve concluded, with so confident a vigor that Jenny had felt uncomfortably like someone awarded a prize in trust before a contest.

"When I speak only when I'm spoken to?" she had answered flatly.

"That's beside the point, it has really nothing to do with the matter. Peter, Jr., tells me there's only one way to stop a man, as he calls himself, in football; but this isn't football—well, not exactly, it is a kind of scrimmage I guess, but you don't have to use brute force to knock them down. It's—well, an effect you have, a kind of remote control. Peter says it beautifully, ever so much better."

"It may be beautifully untrue, you know." Had she been afraid she wouldn't go on, hoping to draw it out?

"It might be, but it isn't. Peter says . . . oh, I do remember. It's like a poem. . . ." She saw once more Eve struggling softly with forgetfulness, the tilted head, the closed lids, exorcising the things of sense, bending to the sound from the wings. Jenny stood

motionless, sensing again that still moment when Eve had stopped, enclosing herself, as if it were a tangible niche, in that fathomless pause. ". . . 'She walks, speaks, looks as if she were moved, inside and out, by unseen winds, as if she had long ago found some treasure everyone was searching for. She's a modern sibyl bound to live out her store of revelation in lovely hints.' " So Eve, in innocent enchantment, simple disciple entoning undeciphered drama, and she, polemicist, submitting knife, spade, bore, the tools of knowing, to self-love's undistinguished fire (oh how unworthy a novice had she been of the whole, the enduring, the natural light) rippling to partial passing warmth in the small unsteady flame.

What meager vintage had she sucked from tribute. For the sweet weak wine of obscure pleasure, rejecting the sharp sustaining draught! She saw now with compelling precision (her fingers reaching out in an odd independent life for her necklace, moving firm from link to link) how tribute was the measure of relinquishment, relinquishment the measure of power, of pain, of tribute, how fulfillment's golden beads were strung on the iron chain of loss.

Yes, the words were a dais—and the homage distant as it was deep. So, with few slight changes, he might have spoken of the Mona Lisa, of a Grecian sculpture. Did it point to some weakness in him, some inferior strain which dissociated Art from Life in the common way? No, knowing the wonder of Peter as she did, that would fit but crudely—and, if she had learned anything at all, it was that the meaning too wide or too narrow alike distorts the shape of the object forcing it to spread, spill over, mingle with like things, become amorphous, or to shrivel and curl, a hard but barren kernel; that the line of meaning one drew must clasp the object closely, fortify, blazon forth its contours. Yes, beauty gave her hand only to those who with epic love and pain and cunning sought out the heart of particularity. And the matchless heart of Peter—that was her ore to mine. She peered ahead marking the street at which she would make the last turning. The stars pointed blue fire; and the street lamps, undismayed by contrast, shone kindly ingenuous beams. She saw the candor of Peter's eyes, the penetration of his smile, the full circle of awareness and humanity, and magically evoked, there rose a music, overtaking the image, 'and all that's best of dark and light meet in his aspect and his eyes.'

The bough had been shaken; effortlessly the golden fruit fell to hand. The Wholeness of Peter, that was the center to which all his action must be configured, a quintessence so rare that had

she not known it, she wondered if she could have conceived it. Beside it, more than feeble and impoverished showed the philosophers' natural man, a creature even inorganic, tortured from his heritage to an alien simplicity. Flowering from the seed of a unique perceptiveness, Peter's simplicity shone forth a rich and cogent bloom. His consciousness (the wind blowing free of the leaves raced to its goal carving a path before her) eluding entanglement in the manifold secondary networks of personality, seemed to encounter straight the vital knotted cord; and, as if the care of that essence whose indispensability alone admitted of no question were clearly marked for him as his best and nearest duty, he rested content in the nourishing of that motor force. How much they underread who labeled roundly "tolerance," "understanding," "good taste," how much they deflected and unranked meaning who termed "colorless levelling," what was in truth the largess of a purity which drew from everything it met the differentiating and necessary good, isolated it in love from its weaknesses, assigned it an unclaimable place, cherished it for its peculiar gift. Peter had never rejected her; he had not had to. Would he have had to turn away the desire to whistle in a twilight garden of cypress and yew. (Her lips pursed, prescind notation of the acrid humor.) He had hit at once upon the axis of her being. She belonged, she mused (shivering, the wind passing blue fingers over the flesh), to an odd race who posed the real and the tangible in mortal combat. It was as if her mind's mirror imaging back from a handful of types—a fragment of life—a surging procession of variations and possibilities, coming upon them at random found them not familiar only but, oh strange transmutation, ghostly reflections, pale, wavering, receding, fluid underwater shapes, dwindling in dimension and solidity. It was as if from a shadowy corner, as she watched the panorama of the seething pit, there rose to her mind's mirror, covering it as with a mist, the vapors of looks, words, gestures, which like a sinister charm recreated in her the emotions of the steaming participants, so that, when circling the edge, one, noting her, stretched forth a hand, saying Come join us, she, remembering sensation, turned from participation's cup now become dreary, tasteless; having won the end, drawn the potency, what need had she of the means, the motion. Peter, like a master artist catching at once the lines and tones most proper to her quality, had placed her at an angle austere though suggestive, put her in a light intense but somber; and the perspective spoke rejection of intimacy's trite and unselective burdens, and the light was not the light of the hearth.

Yet she knew from his wholeness, that he had done so not in the dull and awkward way of cleavage, but with the grace of reverence for an inexorable law which demanded for high mysteries, a high and lonely place, in reverence for the gift of imagination which spinning the cloth of experience to fine transparency, admitted the regenerating light of truth. A hard, dark, jagged coal-flower, touched by a spark, so she felt it, her mind, the tight petals eagerly uncupping, softening, shaping to flame. Joy in Eve, joy in the visible, cheerful, household light—she saw that she had made these possible for him. He would have noted—yes, without her—its numbered delights, laid a wreath at the small altar; but by its side, he must have palely hungered except that he could look upon the ever new, the ever unfolding riches of beauty's limitless house. She looked absently at the rows of even little houses, saw figures of men, in the early dark cut of a piece, reaching, in a choreography of common living, for their keys; heard their tinkling voices raise brave small opposition to the bewitching promise of the great dark world; thought of her house, how she passed with all, in impersonal fellowship, the outer doors, needing but at the innermost chamber a key which she held alone; how like her mind it was, in classic quest and scrutiny, letting pass for review the bazaar's infinity of styles, taking the measure of every good, buying only the imperishable, bringing to a secret temple for rapt devotions its hard-won wonders. Peter, sharing these, could love without a pang the provincial blessings and soft miniature comforts which she could not provide, the gleaming surface joys of Eve's house, its even-ordered colors that turned like a child's pin wheel in a finite symmetry. It was not to be discredited; it was a poetry of a sort. Jenny remembered how long ago, Eve's ingenuities, springing prolifically from a single-minded devotion to all things concrete, had proved a benediction to Peter, making a fairy tale of Poverty; and it had ever freed them both for an endless pursuit. It was a debt she could never repay. Yet it was she, walking with him a wider path to a luminous, timeless order, who had given breadth to Eve's toy house, kept from him the pressure of that low ceiling.

Effortlessly memory raised a tableau. She had gone after class to the staff room, waited for the last figure to free the doorway, and, closing the door, heard Peter saying, "I'm so glad you've come. I feel as if the atmosphere had cleared." She hated coyness but, too tired from words and faces to be wary of effects, she had said, "Exchanging smoke for mist?" And as always the reply was so gentle as not to seem quick, "It's better breathing."

In the modest praise, she saw her function, the renewal of a tarnished world; in the simple recognition she read now how weighing and sifting, she had warded off for Peter the noxious rust of living's unconsidered, unfelt acceptances and denials. And he had given to her all the things that were hers; there was no worthy shoot of reason, of fancy, that coming upon, he did not offer for her pleasure. And Eve, hearing them sometimes talk in riddles, like the good peasant cherishing the light that illumines his icon, begrudged her nothing, held her the more dear, feeling in some unreasoning way a richer peace, a clearer possession. So she repaid her debt to Eve. So they undersigned each the terms of his happiness. To see that was everything. She thought with joy how truth raises a baton, gives the signal, magnetizes from the general blur those colors and lines which alone are relevant to the freedom of beauty. That was her vision, her triumph, to see that, how they were all involved, how their single notes' integralness nested richly in the chord, how they sounded their meaning not three as three but three as one. She heard the bells of the church strike the hour, relaxed her tense hold, let the joy ebb to it, flow with the sound. Sighting the house, Jenny mounted the few steps, and, ringing the bell, felt the harmony of the marksman who has just brought to earth a moving target.

Peter opened the door for her.

"You're the first to come," he said, and led her with an almost gamboling gait, whistling *Come to the Fair*, from the outer hall through the pulsating warmth and light of the parlor to the calmer cheer of the bedroom.

"That's a jolly overture for an entrance," she said, removing her coat, placing it with slow care; thinking how just so must she patiently set aside the living warmth of her secret, wait for the uncrowded moment to enfold herself in its close abundance.

"I have selected it very carefully." He drew it out with mock hauteur. "You're dull tonight."

"What can you expect? I'm here by Special Dispensation."

He dropped the game abruptly. "You're not well," he queried anxiously.

"Oh, perfectly."

The word fell, a round smooth pebble, into a pool of sound.

"Lo, Jenny, zippy weather, huh? Fine for football." She noted sympathetically how Peter, Jr., was always now a little bold, a little embarrassed in his manner. "Fine for anything," Jenny said with comradely cheer, and thought sadly how his years would unfold to a common pattern.

Ruth and little Nora brushed about her, tumbling eager voices, soft looks; blossoms of light, shape of mystery, leaves, she thought (smiling at them and for the fancy) of the Lynden tree.

"Mother will be here in a moment," said Ruth. "May I get you a little wine?" Oh, the little princess, she was lovely fun, at ten, so to treasure courtly ways. As if to choke laughter, Jenny clenched her fist. "Please do," she said weakly.

Peter led her chuckling to the parlor. "She loves so to plan and arrange things. I sometimes think she begrudges Eve the run of the house."

"Oh, it isn't the bustle, it's her sense of style. She will grow up and marry a tycoon, and hold great parties, and always wear white or pale blue and everyone will think her very mysterious."

"Will she be?" Peter bantered, but the bell had rung, Peter rose, Eve called excitedly to come see the table before the others came and walking from the room Jenny caught sight of Nora shyly watching from a low stool half hidden by the arm of the couch, remembered her lapse, felt a merciless twinge, wished fervently the scene could be replayed, and held out her hand, saying, "Let's look together, shall we?"

"Oh, yes," Nora said delightedly, whispering, sharing a secret, "It's prettier than a storybook." Through the longish corridor bright with pastels and water colors, leading her to the dining room, Jenny felt oddly as if she held her own childhood by the hand, as if the child were not part of the household but something of herself which she had believed into existence.

It *was* prettier than a storybook, thought Jenny, and looking from the colored shells of fruit all different shapes and sizes glowing with leaves and nuts and berries, to Eve with her hands clasped before her, caught in her own spell, she said, "You're a witch, Eve. It's the very spirit of autumn and festivity. That reminds me—" she searched, brought out something from her purse, "I thought I might use this as my Christmas design." Eve turned about uncertainly the geometric arrangement of a star and cross and radiating lines. "The colors are lovely," she said; and unexpected, Peter's voice, "It does very well—it makes a stir."

"We'd better," he said, "go back. Mrs. Wilson and the Sheriff . . . uh . . . Dr. Whittlesly and his wife are here." Jenny and Peter smiled at the common clue for laughter. The Sheriff of Nottingham they had dubbed him. Oh, mocking, just, pitiful title! Poor Dr. Whittlesly, she mused; he pursued the elusive jewel of scholarship and all his best laid plans ended in confusion;

diligently he strove to gain, maintain, he hardly knew which, a reputation. His smile would open in greeting from the thin hungry-looking face, like a crevice in a dry earth, he would adjust his trousers meticulously, knock his pipe and say, "I've been thinking. . . ." What, she thought, was the mate of an effigy like?

"Mrs. Wilson's the librarian," Eve said pressingly, noting the length of the corridor and racing for time; "her husband was a professor of Spanish at Smith (why, Jenny wondered hearing the rushing sibilance, did people feel the need for needless anticipation), he's dead, and she's been terribly sweet to the children, she's lonely and a dear."

Giving common warrant of their entrance, Dr. Whittlesly replaced a book, Mrs. Whittlesly turned from an examination of a family portrait, and Mrs. Wilson's sentence fluttered gratefully away from the children, as if, Jenny felt, her attention had been more the product of embarrassment with the others than of interest in Books For Young People.

Dr. Whittlesly, of course, said Peter, knew Miss Smith, Miss Smith did not know the ladies. Above the little flurry of introductions and seating arrangements, Mrs. Whittlesly's massive composure hovered for Jenny like a great static cloud. When, she thought, had so strange a juxtaposition of face and figure gained an effect so inevitable; from the thick inert body rose a delicately golden face, a stillness as of wax, as if a pale and scentless flower had budded oddly from some giant plant. Yet the immobility of the one seemed a natural extension of the other and both came to rest, fulfilled, in the great peaceful lap. If she were a painter, she would set her in a golden plain, enshrine the monumental calm of loins from which all the races of men and had sprung, 'Earth Mother.'

"And what will you name it if it's a boy?" Eve's voice came to her. "John," said Mrs. Whittlesly with calm satisfaction and took out . . . no—yes, it was . . . her knitting.

The needles clicked; the pipe knocked, and prompted to tie the sounds together with a familiar knot, Mrs. Wilson exuberated, "Children are such a wonderful world to explore (Jenny saw her making the posters for display), the very greatest adventure I think ("You'll put a stop to nonsense," Eve had said; she could never hold *this* with a glittering eye); it's so thrilling," she paused (was she not approaching the zenith of her art), unhappily led to fix her glittering eye on Jenny, "so thrilling to see oneself put out in a new edition!"

"Yes," said Jenny, "if the editor is selective." Only Peter laughed; Mrs. Wilson's eyebrows jumped in unison like trained

seals, and Dr. Whittlesly, adjusting his trousers, said in a tone of tentative excitement, "It's occurred to me that something might, perhaps, be done with nonsense verse—that is (Jenny heard Mrs. Wilson's whispered question to Eve, "Did Mrs. Smith have any children?"; Mrs. Smith, thought Jenny dryly, might) in relation to the associative process—and the modern novel—or literature—it might prove (Jenny gathered from Mrs. Wilson's "O-oh" that Eve had communicated the fact of wonder and horror) fruitful."

Peter questioned, and Jenny seconded, whether it would lead one very far; interesting, yes, but would it not merely ascertain a fact already well ascertained? Dr. Whittlesly agreed uncertainly. Mrs. Wilson thought nonsense verse delightful to children of all ages, even grown-up ones, had Ruth and Nora read—what was it—"The Pobble with the Red Nose"? Perhaps, thought Jenny, they had saved him the labor of another useless article. "With No Toes," said Nora.

Might she, she asked, go look out the window? Yes, Peter nodded, intercepting denial. From the lower depths of being, there rose again for Jenny a curious sense of kinship, of interchange with the child; it was as if one embodied the past, one of the future of the other. "She's not doing so well in school," Peter said. "Yet she's very—perceptive. Perhaps," he went on with the clarity of love, "that explains it." The words moved in a slow long wave over an old dry hurt. She wore a crumpled dress and held a book to draw in. Her father read in the dirty green chair. From the floor where she sat she could see the stuffing of the chair like cotton candy pushing out, the torn fringe of the rug, the dust twirling through the tubes of sunlight. Her mother lay ill, she wanted to cry, she asked could she go draw in the attic room, it was better there, she could see the pebbly roofs and the puffs of smoke; no, he said, his arms looked like a bear's, it was just as good here. The door shut to, forever now. Nora would have help, sympathy. Jenny felt her pain redeemed, felt the ache of an incommunicable devotion which, unseen, now humbly kissed his hand, murmuring, "You are a binder of wounds." She would go to Nora, place her hands on her shoulders and say, "Eve is your mother, but you are not her child. Do you remember your book? These people are the world. The world is a giant, and his heart is outside him; it will be trampled and crushed. You and I, we must search for it and bring it back to him, so he will not die before he can know his true and beautiful shape. This is our work, it is full of pain, and the best happiness."

From a farther shore an alarm sounded. "That," said Peter, "must be the Tynsens." Eve rose. "Come, Ruth, I must see to dinner." Mrs. Wilson and Mrs. Whittlesly approved the withdrawal feelingly with understanding smiles and nods. "A familiar name," Dr. Whittlesly said vaguely; "you are acquainted with them, Miss Smith?"

"Mr. Tynsen, yes. A former student, a very aspiring young man."

"Not the Tynsen," his voice crackled with expectancy, "who wrote the series on 'The Olympian Desert'?" The word, voice, manner were as the pressure of a concerted dust.

"The very same," she said temperately, banding her resources against the triple aridity.

"I'm delighted to see you, Jenny," Jerry Tynsen greeted her. Three years ago he had called her Miss Smith. She remarked, with an amusement sharpened by disdain, the easy flight; yes, he took his hints still from the wrong things. He kept his hands in his pockets as if they were weights, she thought, to poise and hold his diminutiveness to earth, and the tiny dark eyes, like stinging insects, bounced and buzzed against his glasses.

"Mr. Tynsen," said Peter, "is on his way East—your home town, in fact, Dr. Whittlesly—to write for *Men and Letters*."

With a tremor of surprise Jenny noted Alice Tynsen's intense absorption in her husband. Where, she thought, was being so stilled to attention, so undeviating in its interest—the tight-rope walker perhaps? It was incredible; it jarred one's sense of fitness. A poor fiction, she decried it, to draw from such slender material so many crucial moments. And the dear Doctor, what would he prove but an abettor of deceit.

"You have done remarkably well," said Dr. Whittlesly bravely, "for so young a man." Something in the tone, its honest effort, displaced irritation with a dreary pity. She pictured his soul as a desert stone unappeased by the comfort of rain, beaten by dry winds to fantastic shape; she read in the words the pang of the man of small abilities, spurred by ambition to a disheartening choice, leaving with forced dignity the great fields where he must remain anonymous, to lord a soil so small, so barren, so remote, that he retains the image of his rule only under the duress of pride.

"Dr. Whittlesly," said Mrs. Whittlesly (engulfing Tynsen in the cool depths of her eyes) "is head of the English department here at Miles."

Jenny felt her eyes hot, felt her heart tingle with embarrassment, felt it cool to awe, chilling the flesh. This parlor Ceres, whose living all was with the facts of tillage, who rested cool and aloof as a water lily above the dark concourse of the secret roots, had sensed, all unthinking, some threat to peace, to order. Sightless, she had plucked from Alice Tynsen's face a challenge to devotion; deaf, she had caught in her husband's praise the sound of retreat.

"It's nothing my dear," said Dr. Whittlesly (their eyes meeting, fastened a latch against the world), repressing a grateful inflection.

So, thought Jenny, this passed for life.

"Not at all," said Jerry Tynsen. Slyly the voice skirted condescension. "Congratulations."

So, she thought (feeling still the look of uncharted bliss between them), this was the superior logic of instinct; these the progenitors, the protectors; this the shelter all sought, this buttressing of weakness with weakness, this flapping of timorous wings over the grounded nest, this artful security which knew every defense but the rising to a freer air.

Miles was very progressive, said Mrs. Wilson, for a small college. She had heard a lecture there once on "The Fruits of Labor." Was Mr. Tynsen a writer? It must be wonderful to give people things to think about.

"I forgot to mention," Peter said, turning to Jenny, "that John Manning will be here."

"Oh," said Jerry Tynsen. "I remember him from some course you gave, the Metaphysical Poets, wasn't it, Jenny? Volatile chap, eh?"

Jenny felt an offense to justice, to art, in the word. "Intense, yes," she said, making the distinction.

"Italian, isn't he?" he questioned Peter.

"His mother. The father—" he smiled as at a harmless caprice, "seems to have had no stake in him but the name."

"His love of the abstract," she spoke as she felt it, vigorously and impersonally, "is universal."

She remembered John Manning as a tender evanescent episode in her life, as a south wind which gently stirred the leaves of her mind without turning the pages. He had literally worshipped her; his very abstention from a personal demand spoke it, as if, she thought (her heart humbly rejecting the image), he accep-

ted that it was not befitting to ask a goddess to take on mortality, as if his one hope were a wish, on her part, finding him worthy, to offer ascension. There had been much, she thought, to endear him to her—his honesty, his devotion to beauty, his warmth.

Was he, asked Tynsen with pointless sarcasm, leading a very colorful life?

"Well," said Peter with a serious air (oh how right he was to waive the tawdry battle), "not from the place one can see. He's been running an elevator for three years. Says it gave him time to think—oh, it's a very quiet, élite place. He's been working on a poetic drama. I understand it's about finished."

Her heart pleaded. He had ever refused to show her the poetry which he wrote in every spare moment. "I will show you only what I believe is the best I am capable of (she recalled the tone of passionate purpose) and then you will see yourself mirrored in all of it." It was the only avowal he had ever permitted himself; and its majesty had touched her so that she had hung her head in a thrill of bewilderment, almost of shame; as if to be chosen the object of an heroic labor made her guilty of some unconscious deception. Yet he had wearied her, and she had been glad, more often than not, to be free of him.

Perhaps, if like Peter, he had had the grace of restraint, of order. True, she had in the classroom infinite patience with the thoughts that quivered, from an agony of indecision, that quaked, from an ecstasy of sudden light, into being. But she would not undertake to accommodate her controls to the ungauged pressures of a murmurous single insistence. It was not, she thought, that she feared pain; but marriage held a threat of extraneous burdens that bore down insidiously, that wedged themselves between oneself and the light, that whittled to fragmentary shape the larger purpose. No, she sighed ("You really ought, Mrs. Whittlesly," trebled Mrs. Wilson, "to send your youngsters to see our puppet shows") it was a leaden key to a circumscribed, to a house of fitful light. The pain freely chosen, silence, denial, the toil of hammering iron gates to gold, this, this, she affirmed, was the golden key to a deathless radiance.

Dr. Whittlesly hoped, with obsequious gravity, that Mr. Manning's work would not expand the Olympian Desert.

At least, thought Jenny, John Manning was not like these, dedicated to life's visual fires. It would be good to see him.

For a moment the conversation sputtered out; for a moment, in the dull smoky hush, Jenny felt how they sat dumb and cold

like mythical figures waiting release, felt how Eve's bright voice and glowing face fell like a fagot across the ashy spell, so that they stirred and smiled as if kindled to awareness of a forgotten kinship.

"I don't like to interrupt," she spoke breathlessly, with the lively absent look of one whose eye rests upon a triumph yet to be enjoyed, "but I think we had better go in to dinner now."

Jenny saw how, at Eve's naïveté, her comic lack of observance, the whole-hearted immersion in her culinary mysteries, how immense affection and a hectic delight rollicked together in Peter's face. Yet, she thought, he stood beyond his joy as well as in it, and his laughter and delight were those of a freeman and not of the slave.

"And will you," he asked with loving impishness, "send Mr. Manning something upon a tray?" But before her mild discomfiture could gather strength, the bell rang a happy summons.

Again they stirred and smiled, noiselessly arranging themselves, deft pullings, fixings, tuckings, a skirt, eye-glass, handkerchief, a syncopated flutter of eager hands. How like figures in a comic pantomime they looked, thought Jenny, and felt, as John Manning entered, their small fidgetings disperse as before a full fresh wind. She sensed, almost with glee, how they looked askance upon his open-collared dress, the charging darkness of his face; and she deemed him, for one flying moment, a knight-errant come to rescue her from a shrinking space. She felt, as they settled the formal terms of their intercourse, that they had taken sides against him, and when, after the warming up round of oh's and ah's at the dinner table, Dr. Whittlesly asked him what was the subject of his play, she thought she detected the first faint call to battle.

"It's hard to say," said John Manning. Jenny read in his face the idealist's desire to be heard, and opposing it the fear that he would not be understood. "Generally, I suppose, the perfectibility of man through love. But" (his dark eyes reflected darker shadows) "it's all in the how, and that's such a . . . new departure . . . relatively. It would have to be read."

"Well," said Dr. Whittlesly, "I should be interested to see it. Perhaps it will be shown?"

"That," said Manning with a dim, preoccupied air, "is hardly possible . . . for a time. It is not," he stared into space as if seeking comfort from some ghostly procession of the great, "what the public wants . . . yet."

"Of course," said Dr. Whittlesly, "as a young writer, you must be wary. There seems to be a ritual worship, in a branch of the new generation, of the obscure. Are you acquainted with Mr. Tynsen's revealing articles on the work of Bishop?"

"Bishop," said Manning (his words flared up as with a protective ring of fire) "is the greatest writer of our time."

Jenny saw with an anguish of pity how the strength of his feeling had not permitted him to work up his case, and was conscious simultaneously of an excitement of relief that he had sprung upon the opposition with the unmistakable challenge of steel.

"You are, then, Mr. Manning," said Tynsen, jumping into the fray with the wiry cagey confidence of the light man who places faith in footwork, "on dangerous ground. There is danger in the . . . rich talent" (did he believe even that, Jenny wondered, or was the concession a ruse) "which in its turbulence overflows the banks of intelligibility and waters a wasteland."

"Sacred ground," said Manning.

Tynsen disregarded the perverse echo. Faster, faster, buzzed his eyes, and as if pacing themselves to the strange metronome, his words came with increasing speed. "It mistakes a personal catharsis for universal redemption." If it were not otherwise plain, Jenny saw in Alice Tynsen's reddening face that he quoted her best-loved author.

"If you insist upon metaphor," cried Manning rapturously, "I would say rather that these talents have labored with a care more measured, more painstaking, more conscious of strain, than your coldest engineers. They have with their godlike patience and immortal zeal" (his voice quaking with the splendor of a denouncing prophet seemed to Jenny to push back the very walls of the room) "enlarged the area of our consciousness to free us for mighty dignities. They have not broken but extended the banks of meaning to keep us from suffocation. They have showered the living waters of their love and pity not on wastelands but on the soul's myriad marginal lands that would fester to fatal decay without them. And their 'catharsis'" (his voice broke as on a lance too sweet for living) "is to die sucking poisons from the veins of their stricken brethren."

Jenny felt the beat of her pulse in her ears, felt her mind, like a banner, unfurl and billow with the burning motto, felt the room shimmer; and, through the dark and ravenous colors of a spectacle-canvas, she grasped the estranged curiosity, the blurred enmity of their faces. Oh, cried her heart (subsiding like a fallen

bird), what had he done? The words could reach her, Peter, (she folded her trembling hands in her lap for secrecy) those who had passed the fiery novitiate, but why, why could he not judge that this was not the way to carry a high mission to an alien country.

"Of course, John," her words rose with soft candor to waylay a hostile thrust, "while I share your sympathies, I think it unfair to Mr. Tynsen's critical abilities to insist upon metaphor; I am sure he used it only as a springboard. You show yourself a poet. But one can hardly settle through imagery a problem in esthetics, in philosophy."

Mrs. Tynsen, felt Jenny, looked at her with a lazy sidelong rebuff, Mrs. Whittlesly with open alienation. Silently they filled their husbands' plates, submissive, she thought, like surgical nurses, like ignorant seconds. What their men fought in an abstract arena, they fought in the realm of flesh. They gauged, with their primitive feelers, the value of their husbands' opposition, she interpreted, by what they conceived to be the failure of her life. She was a sterile anomaly, and they had assigned her to evolution's rubbish heap. She was a threat to the reverie of the blood, and her agreement with John Manning, her participation, she knew, shocked their dull sensibilities more violently than if she had shouted out that they were engaged in an illicit love affair.

"You are right, Miss Smith," said Dr. Whittlesly eagerly, "the language of poetry resolves nothing."

"No," said Manning fiercely, "not the cost of lumber, not the price of tobacco."

Oh, said Eve anxiously, no one had tried the pudding, it was a special recipe, they really must taste it. "I have never eaten better dressing," said Mrs. Whittlesly with matriarchal authority. It had something, chirped Mrs. Wilson, that gave it a special flavor. "Chestnuts," said Eve, alertly.

Would Mr. Manning, said Tynsen, simulating dispassion (oh he was bent, thought Jenny dismally, on giving more prominence to his role), maintain that it was proper to a work of art to make its accessibility conditional upon a study of compendiums and guide-books?

"I would maintain," flashed Manning (his knife clattered to the floor), "that any work of art worthy of the name has depended for its understanding always upon aids gained from innumerable sources. I would maintain therefore that the question of the

form that aid takes is an irrelevant one. It does not matter one whit that you are called upon to sharpen old tools or to use new ones. It is extraneous to the criticism of a work of art that you must toil to win its offering. The one pertinent question is—having won it—‘Is it precious, or is it dross?’”

“Do you pretend,” cried Tynsen, discarding his gentleman’s gloves (his oily face seemed to Jenny to swell and blister), “that you really understand *The Wanderer*?” “Are we to assume,” came Dr. Whittlesly’s voice, rustling a thin indignation like a dry stalk in a wind, “that you have possessed yourself of an amazing knowledge?” Mrs. Wilson delicately raised a glass to her lips smiling nervously at Eve who rose to leave the room with an assortment of dishes. Mrs. Whittlesly and Alice Tynsen exchanged looks, thought Jenny, in a pledge of sisterhood.

“I claim only,” said Manning with triumphant calm, “that what I have taken the pains to understand is rich nourishment, and” (he spoke now with cutting finality) “I do not pretend to judge that which I cannot understand.”

“Come, gentlemen,” said Peter. “You do truth no service by misjudging each other.” The kindness, the peace of his voice and presence seemed to Jenny to fall like a glistening dew on their hard rancor. It would be as false, he went on, to think Mr. Manning lacking in humility as to judge Mr. Tynsen lacking in perspicacity. Mr. Tynsen had unwittingly obscured his position; (how pretty Eve looked from that angle, listening, thought Jenny, like a gypsy charmed by some new strange music) it was clear from his articles (she would deliver up all her worship in a tremulous kiss) that by not ‘understanding,’ Mr. Tynsen meant that he questioned the validity at some points of Bishop’s application of his principle of selection. “And,” he concluded, “since Mr. Manning’s support of his belief, which is also mine—that the inclusion of every part of Bishop’s novel *can* be justified—would entail a careful analysis of the text itself, we cannot, in consideration of the ladies” (he smiled at them with unaffected chivalry; “no,” they clucked, entranced, felt Jenny, by the incalculable grace of his harmony; it was most interesting) “resolve so great an issue in so little time.”

They conceded, modified, reworded. He was a stainless knight, she dreamt, and to do him honor they gave up their vanity-tainted fevers.

They sat in the parlor relaxed and dreamy, engaged in pleasant random musings like tired children, new bathed, milk-fed, in a last soft hour before sleep. He sat among them, her heart

whispered, like a Prince of Peace, gladdening to newness with his love their frayed and weather-beaten plumage, in the bright circle of his virtue turning their difference to legend.

But as they stood in the cold uneven dark, taking their leave (no, she preferred to walk, Mr. Manning would see her home) goaded by the cursing wind and argus-eyed heavens, she felt they sniffed and reared, regained the memory of the riot and blaze of battle, and it seemed to her that behind the rapiers of the night, they retreated like malevolent conspirators.

Cold and still felt her heart, cold and still as the moon.

"They are our enemies," said Manning. "They crawl and creep in a million serpentine shapes, descendants. . . ." The sounds abandoned her, away they rode, away on the dark back of the wind. Where had it fled, where (her heart crumbled to a white sand), the spark ultimate and indivisible that had lit up long long ago the dark shrine of her loneliness. Had they buried it in Peter's house under a blind sand? Had the wind's jealous sorcery whipped it away, the pure point of fire? She sensed portentously the co-existence of the answers, heard in the wistful questions' melody a soft plea for delay against the obdurate shape of speech, felt how beyond the music's veiled sorrow the word waited with austere dignity to be read like a grim epitaph on a marble slab.

". . . Too tired . . . should not have walked."

She smiled at him kindly. He could not lift the weight. Not now. Not ever. "You must not mind my silence," she murmured. "I find movement and speech together still something of a feat."

He was gallant, he was kind, he submerged himself. He would tell her of the quaint characters he came across; it would amuse her. His voice fell to a gentle hum, fell like a grey haze between them, shutting her off with the granite shadows of night. The wind pushed great grey wings against her, a shrieking rapacious bird, you are alone, alone. She tensed herself against desert, and rock, and shadow. Let them marshal all their terrors against her. She was no renegade. There was no death, she said, but in deceit. In the mortar of her heart, truth would grind to dust the superstitions of the flesh. The waters of truth were icy, she said, only to the fearful.

She chose to plunge boldly. Peter's happiness in no way depended upon her. From the equation of his wholeness, this was the answer she should have drawn. By what strange logic,

she asked herself sternly, had she rhapsodized a magical trinity? How had she vaulted to the fallacy? She set aside impatiently as an impossibility the retracing of the steps taken in consciousness; as futile, she thought, as to capture inviolate the progression of a dream.

She had suffered herself to be misled by a false inspiration, by a light outside, a vanishing light, she who knew so well. . . . She had wandered in a cavern, mistaken a luminous spot on the wall for a torch of freedom. Freedom. The word sprang upon her like a villain from ambush. Freedom for what (she pounded weak fists on the mighty chest), freedom from what? She had the only freedom she wanted, the only freedom she could assimilate. She ceased to struggle; she mocked her own querulous voice. She would settle it peaceably.

The wind was dead. There was no need for haste. The night was as a sea of strange calm. Had she not chosen (she sang her heart's ease) freely to bind herself against life's ship, like a prow-head still and rapturous, mutely welcoming not the sea's subtle caress alone, the touch graded to a million delicate tones, touch of blue, pearl, opal, soft subtle ways, endless delicate measures, but the dark and bitter embrace, the grinding ice, the frosty ropes of foam, happy penance for release from the dusty joys, the soddy deaths of life on deck. Had she not (her heart chanted a dirge) freely chosen the discipline, the arduous way of consecration, the appeasement of an impalpable hunger, the fashioning of her kind to vessels— She could not go on; some cloud, wave, log fell darkly across the tracery. She felt it in a moment as a pressure on her arm and obeyed mechanically its command to follow another trail. Might he, asked Manning eagerly, come some day to read her his play?

She was sorry for her neglect; it was unfair, unkind. "I would like immeasurably to hear it," she said in a tone that struck her ear as too warm and too grave. She understood sadly his hope that her acceptance of his work would be wedded to the acceptance of a life. . . . Poor soul. He would offer her a key to a life that she had ever found vague and illusory, its sounds confused, its gestures graceless, its breath lethal. Why did he not understand that she could not make flesh and spirit one, that she found more comfort in the endurance of a pain whose anatomy she perceived than in a joy whose source she could only half discover, that she wanted only to stand still, to feel the earth turn, to watch the seasons fold and unroll, to listen to the music which never ended but on a note that sang itself out in the silence.

She longed for her room; she felt spent and hoarse as if for centuries (a phrase crept up unnoted) she had been wailing in a chasm, and wondered did he see the dryness of her lip, the skin dappled, patches of strain from which the borrowed color had faded. For one moment longer, she pleaded, let me be generous.

Yes, she said attentively, she would like to hear how he had come to write it.

He had gone, he said, to see a religious film, seen depicted the ceremony of elevation to the cardinalship. He had been deeply moved by the bowing and kissing of the foot of the Pope, and the rising and the kiss of the cheek. "I saw," he said (straightening his body as if better to glimpse a vision) "that the one was for St. Paul and the other for Jesus, that the soul of the world cried out against the separation, that it would fly from its cage only. . . ." Her strength failed her, her attention became shapeless, deflated, the sounds fled from the limp form.

Her head sank into the collar of her coat. She made her final preparations, strove to feel anew the blessedness of her path. She saw herself entering her house, pale ascetic in a caravansary; heard her measured steps along the corridor, solemn steps, steps of a visiting monk among Saracens. She would enter the elevator, hear at each floor the familiar click, soft amens to the progress of her retreat. Then at last she would stand alone in her room.

She saw the books of words and music, the pictures ranged about an everlasting verdure, 'unravished brides of time,' she thought, and undimmed by any, the portrait of Dr. Burton, full of the sweet nobility that lived on in Peter—'air soft . . . fire pure . . . water clear . . . earth sure' (the words moved in circles, beautiful pairs of varied birds); and over these talismans of her faith, the guardians of her sanctification, as she put off the garments of the flesh, over these crucibles of grace, her soul divorced from motion would hover as over a deathless rose. For a moment longer as she lay in bed, her heart would press against them as a child against a loved father, her love would rub their amber to a golden fire, ('a bright bracelet of hair about the bone,' she sang) and turning off the light, as she lay there shrouded in triple cold, layers of white, sheet, gown, flesh, above the cold numb body her heart would hang forever incandescent like a star. Blaze like a star, a star. . . .

The word hurtled through space, shattered to a million fragments. . . . The Christmas design! had she lost it? . . . taken it out at Peter's?

She stopped abruptly, opened her purse, moved fingers about with concentrated care, as if spurred by some atavistic dread that losing it, she should find her room gone.

Ah, there. Safe.

"Do you have your key?" cried Manning, with the disproportionate anxiety of the would-be lover. His voice seemed to her to crash against the night as a stone against glass.

"I don't need a key," said Jenny softly, and steeled herself against the sudden frost which glazed her heart.

THE FANTASTIC SYMPHONY

Lloyd Alexander

I

First he recalls that uneasy state of mind . . . which he experienced before he met her . . . then the volcanic love with which she suddenly inspired him . . . his moments of anxiety, of jealous fury . . .

—Hector Berlioz:

“Notes on La Symphonie Fantastique”

YEAR AFTER year the old habits come back, the old shapes, the colors. This is the same beach, the same fine sand of summer. This is my same hand that holds your lips in its palm despite my pretexting, despite all the hours of time we have tried to put between ourselves. You can no more be free of me than I can be free of you. And if my mind is a junkshop full of Dresden china figures with clocks for navels, a collection of dust-catching, rusted antiques, your face is light living color and your body is the form of my memory.

“You can only be seduced once. After that, the pretence is over. And seduction cannot exist without it.”

“Let’s go to Vineland together,” she said.

You sink into the ocean like a stone. The water covers your hands and eyes. All that is left of you is myself.

We sat on the steps of low starless clouds. The night is hot, pressing on us, sinking through the trees that line your dark streets. And there is so little to say.

If you were to take my hand I would feel no more than light coming through a window. Intimacy is the loom we are woven together on. Separation is undreamed of when we are together, and when we are apart we do not forget.

* * *

The following afternoon we had sandwiches with Anna. The sun was hot yellow on the street but the red-and-white kitchenette was fresh and cool. We called Anna "Four Plus" because her name was Wasserman.

"You look like a fine young man," she said. "But you're too nervous. One of these days you'll probably come hollering for me to psych you."

"I probably will. Give me a rake-off as an old friend?"

"Sure." She was a pleasant stout little kid from Vienna and liked to smile.

We helped her clean the kitchen. Anna brought out a bottle of cold ginger-ale and some rye and we sat in the cool house, watching the trees grey with dust and we drank every bit of it.

I see you at the bottom of a spiral of white smoke, as I might look deep into a seashell and see the pink echo of waves. The smoke crumbles like a wall around you. I try to see you with Kirby, your husband, but he is too far away now. I have no time for him. Your hand and my hand are bound with threads and the least breath may break them. I hold you the way a statue holds its stone expression. Now there is no danger of threads breaking. Force and gentleness have conquered each other, there is no difference between winner and loser. Strength and weakness are spun from the same flax of moments.

Before leaving Anna we talked about Vienna in 1934 and before we had finished we understood each other. We had all understood each other.

And then we went home.

"I'm not afraid," she said. "But every time I think about it, I think I ought to be afraid."

A still room of a still house in which nothing moves, in which sounds lose their identities and words are silent as flowers. In which there is no need for listening.

The trees motionless in the air are your shadow. About you there is nothing but the thin veil of your own unspoken words, answering the thousand questions of my lips. There is nothing we two do not know, here or in any other place. Yet the idea of a world is impossible for us. Yet so much is possible. I send out images of myself to you and you answer me softly, your face hidden from my own.

"I have no reasons that I can explain. But I know them as well as my name. I know that I can never explain them to you."

Every so often a car turns down the street and from the window I can see the glint of sun from the windshield. I have

nothing to do or say—except that we were promised this, that we have deserved as much. Now I can hear occasional footsteps and voices where before there was nothing. Soundless and vacant as a dry well. I go into the living room and turn on the radio. I look at the big photograph of Kirby on the mahogany-colored writing desk. Time has begun to start up again, slowly, slowly cracking like wagonwheels breaking out of the frozen mud of a winter road.

Things are drifting into their natural positions of chairs, tables, sofas. The radio is making a low hum. The station hadn't been tuned in right and I turn it off rather than hear something of no importance to us. And now, as much as there ever will be, there is definity of place and time. I have all my concrete references for the moment, knowing that in a short time they will become as useless and meaningless for me as they were before. And I see you again; place and time are cast off like clothing, memory invades our present, the whole flood of it sweeping us along, past the deserted houses of reality.

I knew I had to leave. This much at least.

"I'll walk to the station with you," she said.

We closed and locked the door behind us, but for both of us there was a key we could never use apart. For both of us there was a key we could never use together.

Year after year, the old habits, the old shapes, the colors. Our keys are made of habit, or rather our keys open habit. Closing time is another story. The shapes are unmistakably, impossibly the same. The sea turns to a field of green grass, the sand becomes a city—any city. Your arm is the corner of a street and the street is familiar to me.

I walk on the pavements of your body and still see you in the open windows of innumerable houses. Summer is in my blood and always has been, for in summer, walls turn to light. In summer your windows are as wide open as air. And air is tangible as flesh.

This is the same heavy night. This is my same hand.

II

He sees his beloved during a ball, at a gay and brilliant party.

Peter and I went to the *Balajo* with the woman we called Johnny. That night the sky was clear and the high column of Bastille looked like it was made of jelly, almost translucent in

the summer air. The *Place* a ring of light windows, the faces fluid, coming and going. Rue de Lappe with the garish, dancing letters in neon reds and whites, the rest of the dark street dressed in dark cobbles.

"This is where you used to see the *vrais de vrais*," said Johnny. "The *apaches*. But there aren't many of them any more."

You are a lovely woman, Johnny. You are blonde and warm and you have not forgotten how to laugh. You have the smell of life in you and at times you are like a child, wide-eyed and loving. And you are always more than you think yourself to be. Peter calls you the *femme-enfant*. I call you as much Paris as anything I know.

We pushed into the *Balajo* and stood for a long time, looking for three seats. The bar in front was bright, the *bal-musette* itself dim, shifting with colors. Peter said, "It looks like a movie set."

Johnny nodded. "Yes. *Tout à fait cinéma*."

As much as I am, as you and all of us. And if we call this another world it is because we do not recognize it as our own. The streets, the *papier-maché* houses, the wooden figures motionless at the windows. Even artificial stars winking in a cardboard sky. And how much of this is the *Balajo*? How much of this is any musette of the thousands we have known, you, Peter and I, Johnny?

This is the very smell of movement. Smoke and sweat are solid as dancers. The lights that change from red to yellow to blue to red again are the colored motions, the reflections of a tango, a java. You can dance a java too, Johnny. And I wish I could dance it with you. Peter asks you and I watch you move into the crowd. I drink cognac and water and watch you turn with the lights. Turn with the sounds, the smells, in my own vision of a cockeyed *papier-maché* musette.

The whole floor turns into a wheel of fortune in the Fête Montmartre. It spins and out of it I see a face come up where the lucky number should have been.

"Why don't you dance with me?" Johnny settles herself on the little chair at the end of the table. On the other side I can see Peter through the crowd of carafes and glasses.

"I want to keep my reputation as a degenerate," I said. "Dancing with you would spoil it."

She answers me but all I can hear are the long notes of the accordion, trembling like a woman's body in pleasure. Peter and I drink our triple cognacs. It saves time that way. The accordion starts knifing through my head.

Johnny's face is shining with perspiration but she is smiling. "I always like to go out with you two," she said. "You are both so easy to predict. Now the two of you are going to pout like little boys. You always do that when we drink."

"At least we don't get raucous." Peter pulled at his shirt, stained dark and wet under the arms and around the chest. "Tell Johnny in French. Oh, to hell with it."

The air is heavy on my hands. Music covers my face like a mask. The dancers are close-packed, moving waves on a light ocean. For a moment I think I see you dancing in the trough of white sea-foam, the waves surrounding you. I look into your eyes and you come to me, bringing with you a sheet of blue water, carrying it about your shoulders like a cloak. Together we wrap ourselves in it and all sound is shut out. There are only your eyes and the far-off booming of a great submerged bell. Together we are hot and empty and alone. Time is the white beating clock of your throat. Your mantle ebbs away from us and music takes its place. The accordion and the guitar make patterns of lace with one another and I know the music and the song, heard once through the walls of a cheap hotel room where I slept, fondling a threadbare evening; and once again in the space of street outside a little bar, sung by a lonely Moroccan drunk.

I draw the hanging curtains of your sight and with my hand gently push open the door behind them, finding myself in an airy room, simply furnished. There finding you, warm with speculation. Outside there is a season of sound and motion but the door is locked from within. External seasons invade us only at our will. Summer and winter pass by us only to be forgotten. Spring sends an envelope of seed, left unopened in a dressing-table drawer. We are two pillows on the autumn bed and the earth sleeps with us, awakens only as we awake. Our walls are white in daytime and in the evening glow with our own looks. Our high ceiling is bounded only by night itself or by your hand raised upward in sleep.

At the table I drink you like water or wine.

Peter ordered more cognac and water. We have already missed the last *métro* at eleven-thirty. "To hell with it," he says.

Johnny shrugged. "We can walk." The *Sixième Arrondissement* is a half an hour away, after that to Opéra, another half hour for us.

The dancers had thinned out a little and the music played into a void. At midnight they flash the lights off and on and start closing.

The warm air is soft and whitish, as though filled with tiny particles of dust. We follow the Seine, past the great stone prayer of Notre-Dame where ivy falls from the riverbank, etched in green-black on the stone. The water is scarcely moving but reflections of the night shimmer on it.

"Peter is sad," Johnny said.

I know that for this time past he too has been living in his own room. And for that time as well, Johnny has been lost in thoughts of her own gentleness.

"Peter is never sad," I said. "Tell Johnny our motto."

"Our motto is Mehitabel's—or Archie's. *Toujours gaie*. Try and explain about the cockroach and the cat for her."

"Impossible. And it wouldn't make sense now."

Johnny laughed. "It's a good motto. But with you it's a lie."

"Not at all," Peter said. "*Toujours gaie*. Remember that, Johnny."

The sound of water on stone is the sound of a key turning softly in a lock.

"All right," Johnny said, "*Toujours gaie*."

III

The playing of two shepherds one summer evening in the country . . . restores his calm. . . . But she appears again . . . and his heart stops beating. . . . What if she has betrayed him?

I cross the stone bridge and follow the bend of the stream, past the green pavilion of trees. The air has a saffron smell. White sky curves like a hand, the fingers thrust deep into the fringe of trees beyond. As I walk towards it I come to a solitary tree whose branches are curled, flexible fingers, whose trunk is an arm of rose flesh. I touch the smooth, solid skin, feeling the trembling pulse of its blood sap. Sleek, bitter-voiced crows have made their nest in the outstretched palm and I see their eyes glistening like fresh stains on a white tablecloth.

They nestle in the tree's palm as a black dream rests forgotten in the mind. A wind rises and sweeps across the pavillion, stream and field. Other branches snap and fall, their leaves dashed to a death of green water. But there is nothing strong enough to shake this nest. The tree's fingers cage around it, holding and protecting it. Then, as quickly as it came, the wind dies and sinks into the ground.

I walk through the wet shining grass of silence. I absorb it, fill myself with it and let it go again. Breath is unnecessary for I am surrounded by the whole forest breath itself. It moves in me and I respond to it like dry earth to rain.

The stream, stepmother of stones and crayfish, hums an endless song, and runs like sound between the brown pattern of its banks. Pebbles are eyes in the soft silt bottom, staring to heaven above the wrinkles of the water's surface. I thrust my hand in it and water flows around it, sealing up the wound in its flesh. My dripping hand is full of its substance but I cannot keep it. Already the wound I made in it has moved on, dissipated itself like passion.

Evening overflowing from its hidden cup turns the sky red. The crows have left their nest. I see the black blurs of their bodies circling, spiralling, ravishing the tree of its heart-shaped leaves, leaving the fingers naked.

I see you sleeping doubly and far away. The tree is your own arm caught up in the impersonal kisses. The bedsheet rapture of a sightless face. The dawn of your body rises on a black morning of rain, a day of dead stones. I see the secret doors of you open, lock broken, hinges fallen and the key thrown down the well.

Your morning has taken a different name and my own morning has lost its identity in grey, fog-banked streets, knowing only the orange glow of backless windows lighted before a winter sunrise.

Sky, stream and trees, clouds turn black. Wind merges and spins them like a top. Only the tree of your hand is white. The crows are dispersed, driven through the air, only to return more ravening than ever. Your nest is still guarded in the hollow of your palm, in the hollow of my own mind.

I cross back over the stone bridge. I turn and leave the forest. Your hand, your tree disappears. Sky drops like a curtain.

IV

He dreams that he has killed his beloved, is condemned to death. The procession moves forward to the strains of a march, alternately sombre and wild. . . . As it nears the scaffold, momentarily a vision of his beloved appears.

A drumbeat brings you running from your houses, tumbling down the stairs, tripping over your chamberpots, cursing, jarring,

crowding into the streets of bankruptcy. A dog in heat will send you prying, itching, nudging each other, whispering behind your hands. A dog in rage will turn you green with fear.

A procession forms in the cobbled square.

Justice rises to the occasion, pulls off his nightcap and puts about himself tender spittle as a robe of office. Dignity is rumpiled in a heap with the bedclothes or thrown into the dirty laundry bag. The scales are broken, the blindfold ripped off and a pair of distorting spectacles put in their place. With a slow, majestic pace he marches to the square where already there is a reek of voices, the hot breath of words repeated and repeated until they are done to death and rot with it.

Fire chiefs, deputy sheriffs, public officials, artists in the slick paint of hatred, lynch lawyers, barbers, terrorists carrying stuffed briefcases and wearing double-breasted tweed suits, butchers sharpening their knives of frenzy, jostle and cry havoc, piss in the corners, riot over the flags and martial music.

Religion hoists its apt symbol of the crucified and you fall on your knees. You use the name of God only to damn with. Your own sins are blacker than night, yet you curse the man of pardons, you stone the adulterer, the while itching in your own bodies, the while wrapping your hands around abstract buttocks. If marriage is holy, you are blasphemers and your wives are sluts, whores, lost in the contemplation of their own devious orgasms.

You are full to bursting with fear. Your bodies are burning with it and you can cool them only with the mud of ignorance and indifference.

Distrust is your ready money, perversion your bank account and truth your one grand deficit.

You are brothers only by incest. I love you is perjury.

In the morning I wake and smell hot, fertile summer in the air. Sight is the curved petal of daylight through a clear window. Sound is the breathing of a season.

The smell of smoke is in the air. In the public place books are being burned, their ashes taken to be sold under the counter along with spicy westerns and the trumped-up confessions of mental grave-robbers. There are no secrets from you but your secrets are open lies. The smoke weaves white bonds around you, blinds your eyes and makes you weep tears of passion. But your libraries are bound in human skin. And the fire keeps burning. The heat of it becomes tremendous but you cannot put it out.

The drumbeats grow louder. Streets spin to the vortex like a whirlpool and their pavements are broken. Trees are uprooted

and the leaves flow like water. Their wood is taken for the scaffold and the gallows. Their branches become instruments of murder on a quiet, sleepy night. They are sawed into planks to make coffins and their sap is not green but red. The nest of birds is scattered and the eggs smashed. The fruit is stripped and left to rot.

Rivers turn to tears and are dried up under an inclement sun. The wind blows backward to wreck a city.

Of all these phenomena the educators take notes, writing in their pageless copybooks with broken-pointed pencils, turning away their blind eyes, shaking their fingers, wagging their heads heavy with the dust of degrees.

And the procession is forming, flowing through the broken streets in a wave of party hats and firecrackers. Tolerance dances a drunken jig to the tune of *MacNamara's Band*. Children armed with cap pistols play at being vigilantes.

But I'm not so hot myself.

How many times have I chased the butterflies of dishonest rhetoric with a baseball bat, beat my breast, cursed my future, ignored my impotence. And sold my phony soul to the lowest bidder. How many times have I played the tragedian in a Paris bar, passed my dishonesty off as pure silver, built houses of marked cards. How many times have I spoken when I should have kept my mouth shut and kept my mouth shut when I should have shouted from the rooftops.

But at least I am not cursed with a faulty memory. Or blessed with a faulty memory. For the only peace is oblivion for those who believe in war.

Or play blind-man's bluff with truth.

Or a thousand other things. I could make a catalog of them but it wouldn't sell as well as Superman. And that might be for the best after all.

Is Coney Island the only salvation?

Under a black sky the procession continues. I recognize your faces and I recognize your steps. Your faces are masked, unmentionable lusts. Your steps crack the thin ice of reason. Your only health is 20/20 on a doctor's eye-chart.

There is no gibbet as black and ugly as the one which passes itself off as the instrument of law. Or the law which passes itself off as the people's voice. Nor the people's voice turned to the hysterical shrieks of a few murderers. And so on and so on.

Let me take your hand. My morning is full of you. My old, far-away sheets are still warm with you. Give me your hand.

We can only find what we are seeking together. Is this the key you have dropped? Or was there ever any key?

We close and lock the door behind us, but for both of us there is a key we can never use apart. For both of us there is a key we can never use together. Year after year, the old habits. Our keys are made of habit, or rather our keys open habit.

There are things I shall never be able to ignore. But meaning and significance are only quiet laughter in a dim hallway when everyone else has gone to sleep.

Between us there are echoes. But if they separate us, the flow of sound from our different voices bring us together.

Our clothing is cast off but solitude is the only nakedness.

The procession has trampled the sky to a pulp and it rains down on them, swelling the rivers, flooding the gutters, washing away the painted masks, leaving the fires smoldering. Drenching pretense.

But still it continues, unswerving, implacable, steadily marching to its own gallows.

V

Now he sees himself in frightful company—ghosts, magicians, monsters—who have come to mourn over him. Briefly he hears the beloved melody, but it is transformed, vulgar, grotesque. . . . Lost is her shyness, her nobility. . . . She joins in the infernal orgy.

Grey light filters through the window and chokes me. A child stands beside my bed and I look into his eyes of mirrors. In them I see whole stretches of mornings of loneliness, breakfast tables loaded with the cereals of bitterness, the mouth wiped clean with a white napkin, the hair brushed and parted. I hear the sound of voices laughing, crying, shouting. But under them all, like the underground spring in a cedar lake, is the insistent note of sorrow. The child multiplies until I am surrounded with his eyes and faces. I wonder which of us is dead and which of us is living. Which of us stays to mourn the other. They stretch their hands toward me and I close my eyes too late. Now there is nothing I have not seen again, that I have not known.

The places of the children are taken by men hooded in black, moving slowly about me, posturing, gesticulating with their hands and fingers of serpents. The sound of their feet is louder than thunder. When they speak their voices are axes striking at the heart of a tree. Their words are as unintelligible as ashes.

Under their feet time cracks like an empty eggshell. They fill the room like ink dropping in a fishbowl and I fight to keep from losing myself in their invisible faces. Their form changes to black ships riding at anchor in a dark harbor, from ships to lines of rising hills under a flat sky of lead. Their flapping hoods are whirlwinds joining together to form one great spinning mass that points at me with the long fingers of tempest.

Tell me your name, your address. Give me all the particulars of your birth, your death, where, when, how and above all why. Tell me the day, month and year of your first sorrow. How old are you in minutes. What is your ambition in life. Do you have any particular skills or hobbies. Write a fifteen thousand word essay on what any given thing means to you. Have you ever stolen, murdered, been put in jail. Have you ever travelled. Do you expect to go anywhere in the near future. If you had three wishes what are the things you would not wish for.

I feel a hand on my shoulder. Through curtains of mist I see the face of a woman and remember. I feel her strange body next to mine.

"You were talking in your sleep," she said.

"Ah." My own voice is detached from me and I no longer recognize it. "What did I have to say?"

"You cursed in a foreign language."

What if all languages are foreign. Little by little memory comes back to me. I can see through the blackness into the small vestibule and the table covered with orange peels and cigarette butts. I recall an evening of crumpled paper bags, glasses of beer, listening to a girl orchestra in a cafe. I recall vague words, gestures, acknowledgements.

"Try and go back to sleep."

She turns, her face indenting the pillow, her hand dropped in sleep against my own. Outside it is dead still but on the floor above I can hear two voices in the darkness. There is no morning or night and never has been. There are only the old motions, the old habits.

She sleeps. Again I see the children hiding in the corner, apprehensive, waiting like mice. The hooded men are stirring. But with a turn of my hand I avoid them all. I pass by them, turn a dozen corners, losing them and myself in the maze of a city.

I turn into the first bar and see you sitting at a table, your head lazily leaning on your open hand and a red smile on your lips.

"Hello, kid. Come in and have a beer."

I sit down at the table. "The world gets smaller and smaller," I said. "You never know who you'll run into these days."

The waiter brings me a beer and I hold it in front of me, looking down at the white, opaque foam. I drink a little and it is so bitter that I almost strangle on it. I cough and wipe my mouth and as I look up I see one of the hooded men standing quietly in a corner. My stomach tightens and I think I'm going to be sick. I try to light a cigarette but the matches keep going out.

"Don't worry," she said. "We're all friends here. He's been pimping for me for the last ten years." She takes a pocket mirror from her handbag and I watch her turn her lips into the soft, scarlet wing of a bird. Then she laughs.

"I'll tell you one thing. I was surprised as hell to see you. I thought you were dead."

"I don't feel dead. Or maybe I do at that."

"Ungrateful bastard. I sent you a condolence card, too. A beautiful little card full of doves and angels, all tied up in a big hunk of black crepe."

"I never saw it. It must have gotten lost somewhere. Either that or somebody stole it before I had a chance to see it."

"Makes no difference. It's all the same thing, one way or another. Someday I'll buy a new one."

The bar is completely empty. The man in the hood, even the waiters have disappeared. Now there are only the two of us. The lights have been switched out and we see each other darkly, distortedly.

"So what have you been doing with yourself?" She shows me her leg. "Feel that. Pure nylon. I've been making a fortune on the races but outside of that I don't have a damn thing to show for it."

There is no more beer in my glass. "I better go now. I have a date in a few minutes."

"See you later."

I stop for a moment. "By the way, who paid for the beer?"

"It's O.K. All on me."

"See you at the races."

"Right. My colors are green and red. Never bet on me to win, but show ought to get you money."

Year after year the old habits come back. The old shapes, the colors of billboard advertisements. This is the same son-of-a-bitch, the same fine sand of a broken egg-timer.

We are two pillows on the autumn bed and the earth sleeps with us, awakens only as we awake. Our walls are white in the daytime and in the evening glow with our own looks. Outside there is a season of sound and motion but the door is locked from within. For both of us there was a key we could never use apart. For both of us there was a key we could never use together.

Morning is all your hidden colors that I feel without touching. The sea is smooth only in your sight. If I speak, you answer me. And your hands are as much a voice as your words. Night moves according to the reason of your motion.

This is the same heavy night, this is my same hand.

A MOURNING

Catharine Carver

IT WAS LATE ON a Friday night, my sophomore year at the College, when we heard about Jamie Briggs.

I was sitting downstairs in the clubhouse parlor, trying to study, because my roommate had gone to bed. It was April, and getting green outside, and as I sat in the chilly, upholstered room, staring through the lace curtains at my reflection in the dark window, I was thinking I'd walk out the dirt road behind the dormitory Sunday, if it was fine. It must have been after midnight, because the dates had all departed before I came down, the whispering and kissing on the front porch had long been over, and on the sign-out card in the hall each space was filled with an obedient name; the girls were all upstairs and the house was quiet. I could hear water running and knew it was Lacey, washing her hair, and the faint thumping over my head was Bess doing her exercises. The front door was locked.

When the phone rang it sounded frantic in the stillness, and I was halfway up the steps to answer it before the first ring stopped. Even so, Bess got to it before me, and I stopped on the step below her. Lacey stood at the head of the stairs in her pajamas, her head covered with soap like a wig, her face inquiring. No one ever called this late.

"Kappa House," Bess said. "Rachel? No. No, I think she's in bed."

Lacey looked toward Rachel's door and then nodded at us, spattering soapsuds.

"Yes," said Bess. "Yes, Bill—what is the message?" Then she was silent a long time and I saw her face change as she listened.

"Yes. I see. When—? Oh. Yes. Yes, we'll tell her. Yes. What—what happened to him, Bill? Oh. I see. Well, we'll tell Rachel. Yes. Thank you, Bill."

Bess hung up the receiver. For a moment we three held still as in a tableau: Bess at the phone with her back to us; Lacey sitting on the top step, her hands covering her bare feet and her chin on her knees; I standing stiff and planted below the landing. Lacey and I knew something had happened to Jamie Briggs; his club brothers had called to tell Rachel, who had been going with him. And Bess, I saw as she finally turned to us, flushed and crying—Bess knew that Jamie Briggs was dead.

"Is it about Jamie, Bess?" Lacey asked the question, but I felt such impatience with the heedless, hopeless answer that must come that I could barely keep from turning away.

"Yes," said Bess. "Jamie's dead. His mother found him when she got home tonight, and the boys went over. Bill thinks it was a heart attack."

"How awful!" Lacey said, water from her soapy hair running down her cheeks as fast as Bess's tears.

"We've got to tell Rachel." Bess spoke with dread.

"*Tomorrow*," I said urgently. But they seemed not to hear me, and I wondered if I had really spoken, I felt so shut away from them.

"Everyone's asleep," Lacey said, looking behind her. "Rachel's been in bed for hours. I think we ought to wait till tomorrow to tell her."

"I suppose it would be easier then. After all, it isn't as if they were engaged or anything."

"No. He really didn't date her very much. It was mostly the glee club and her playing for him. But this is so—quick, and *awful*."

"Yes. It scares you, doesn't it?"

"I never knew he had a bad heart."

"Neither did I."

They were whispering, though they hadn't been before, and Lacey looked behind her again and said, "We'd better go to bed, before somebody wakes up; then we'd have to tell it tonight."

All the soapsuds had evaporated and the water was running even faster down her face. "I have to finish my hair," she said.

They must have forgotten I was there, for Bess started up the steps, saying, "We'll have to get up before anybody else. Set your alarm, Lacey, so you'll be sure—" Then she turned

back toward me. The tears had all dried and her eyes were thoughtful and clear. "Are you coming, Ruth?" she whispered.

"No, not yet," I said. "But you can turn off the hall light. I might be a long time." Knowing I would be a long time.

Hours after that I was still lying stretched out on the couch in the parlor. So much time had passed that I might have been asleep; but I knew I had been awake, thinking. My feet were cold, and I turned on my side and tried to tuck my robe around them. The light was in my eyes, and I reached up and turned it off. Then it was so dark I could see none of the objects in the room, except the mahogany end table, where the street light at the corner was mirrored in it. I had been thinking about *him*.

Jamie Briggs had high, narrow shoulders, a narrow body, long hands and feet, and a narrow, beautiful face, with blue eyes and black shining hair that rose in a crest and sometimes fell curving across his forehead. When he spoke his voice was mild, and when he sang it was high and sweet and a little thin. He always walked very fast and seemed intolerant of the clothes he had to wear and the ground he had to step on. But with people he was gentle and gay, and he laughed a great deal. I had never known him except by sight, to speak to, but I was moved when he sang, and when I saw him striding toward me along the Quad, his head back, I always imagined he must be singing to himself, and always hoped in a vain way that he would stop and sing to me. He was always quiet when he reached me, of course, and though he smiled and spoke, he always passed by without singing.

But that night when I remembered him in the dark parlor with his death announced, his quality was intensified till he seemed to me to have been a figure impossibly fine. It mattered very little to me, then, that he had gone. After the moment at the phone I felt no grief for him at all, though once I thought: He was supposed to sing in Chapel Monday, and now he won't be able to. It was rather a sense of vast discovery I had, of having found out, only then, his great importance to me. I went lingeringly, lovingly, over every memory of him I could summon, and when I groped upstairs to bed finally, my ears were confused by the sound of his voice, and I saw him brilliantly smiling out of the dark all around me.

II

I left for work early the next morning, before Rachel was up or the news told. As I walked uphill to the campus, as I remembered mechanically not to step on the seal sunk in the entrance to McDowell Hall, I was still thinking of Jamie Briggs with all of the previous night's excitement. I looked around in the gloom of the building, almost with apprehension, for someone who might approach and tell me of his death; I was afraid I might smile, if anyone spoke his name to me, with a kind of joyful recognition, afraid I could show no sorrow at all.

But there was no one in the hall. When I went in the door marked PUBLICITY the outer office there was empty too, but behind the door to the Boss's office—strangely shut—I could hear Dr. Mac, the College president, speaking fussily but indistinctly, and the Boss answering him in monosyllables. I was looking through the mail when the door opened and both of them came out, still talking.

I had never seen Dr. Mac so upset as he appeared then. His face was pale, and his speech came jerkily. "Now above all," he was saying, "get it to the Graysville papers right away—the *Star* in particular. You'd better call Masters now, before he has time to do anything." He went out the door, nodding curtly as he passed me.

The Boss went back into his office. He was staring out the big window at the vacant green Quad and the Gym at the other end of it when I came to the door. None of his habitual jauntiness sounded when he said to me: "Ruthie, call Jinks and tell him to come over before he sends anything to the *Star* about Briggs."

I was grateful: he took it for granted that I had heard the news. Though he of all the College, I thought, would have been least amazed if I had smiled outrageously when he told me.

Jinks, the student correspondent for the Graysville evening paper, sounded sleepy when he came to the phone. But he said at once: "Sure. I'll be over in ten minutes."

Then I went to the Dean's Office, as the Boss asked, to get Jamie Briggs's folder. I looked at what it contained almost with wonder, though the history that spelled itself out across the filled-in blanks of the many forms had been known to me.

James Montgomery Briggs, II. Senior, Chester College, I read. Age 21. Home address, Chesterton, Ohio. Father, James Montgomery Briggs, Professor of English, Chester College, deceased. Mother, Mary McBain Briggs, housewife. One brother, Christopher McBain Briggs, age 17, freshman, Chester College. Academic major, music. Activities, glee club, a capella choir, dramatics society, Omicron social club. . .

All the knowledge I had of him was in this folder, I thought, weighing it on my palm. And none of the facts, or all of them, written here in his round open script, equalled what he meant to me; yet I held his life in my hand.

I took the folder in to the Boss, who was already typing the lead on his story. Without pausing he asked me to bring him Jamie Briggs's most recent picture from our file. As I went out I heard the typewriter rushing on, relentless to write the end of the history in the folder.

I got Jamie Briggs's pictures out of the file and spread them across my desk. Here were his freshman admission picture, where he looked eager and thin, holding the slate with his name chalked on it; his yearbook pictures for three years; his picture as soloist with the glee club; with the College quartet; in his makeup as Cyrano in the junior class play. Here was his latest picture, taken to use in publicity for his senior recital: this one, where he wasn't smiling, where he looked older (he will never be any older now, I thought, but without a trace of pain), this one would do for the Graysville papers.

Jinks came in as I was gathering up the other pictures to put them away. He only lifted his hand to me as he went past me into the Boss's office; in a moment the Boss came to the door and smiled at me apologetically, then shut himself and Jinks in. The outer office seemed dark with the door shut, ominous as before a rainstorm. There had never been any secrets from me before.

I might have listened at the door, I might have found out what they were saying, but their secrecy troubled me little. My hands were still full of Jamie Briggs's pictures, and I stared at them and could not put them away. I wanted to take them all home with me and hide them in my books, to have his face always coming before me suddenly as I turned a page. Even in the cavalier costume and false nose of Cyrano, he looked impatient and graceful and about to sing.

The door opened again and Jinks emerged. The Boss's typewriter went rushing on and Jinks came over to my desk and began to shuffle through the pictures, frowning and looking at Jamie Briggs's pictured face as intently as if it were his own, in a mirror.

I took the print I had chosen in to the Boss. He nodded when he saw it and jerked the page from his typewriter. Cramming the copy and picture into an envelope, he took his raincoat off its hook and started out.

"I'm going to take this to Graysville, Ruthie," he said. "Why don't you close up?" He said "So long" to Jinks and was gone.

He had left a carbon of his story, and before I filed it away I read the lead: "James M. Briggs, outstanding senior student at nearby Chester College, died suddenly Friday night of acute coronary thrombosis . . . His loss will be felt . . ."

When I came out of the Boss's office Jinks was still looking at the pictures. I gathered them up, then, under his gaze, and put them out of our sight.

"How about coming down town for coffee?" Jinks said to me.

I said, "All right," for I thought he would tell me why he had been sent for, and why they had shut the door against me. I thought he would tell me, too, how Jamie Briggs had died, for he was a club brother and must have been at the Briggses the night before.

Perhaps I was thinking by that time that knowledge of his death would complete and preserve my feeling for Jamie Briggs. Surely he had died beautifully: the word *beautiful* was constantly in my mind to describe him.

When we came to the curve in the walk, where it got steeper going down, the wind caught us as it always did in that place. Jinks pushed his square-looking shoulders into it and said in his loud sure voice, as if in accusation: "We were up most of the night."

When I said, then, "Will you tell me everything about it, Jinks—tell me how he died?" he stopped and looked at me sharply with something like astonishment.

Then he looked away again and went on walking, and when he spoke his voice was as loud and certain and factual as before. He said, "Jamie didn't die—he killed himself."

The stone steps at the foot of the Library walk were cold when we sat on them: their coldness came through my coat and against the backs of my legs, though the sun felt warm on my face. Below us on the campus drive, people we knew passed continually and waved. But we never waved back; we sat motionless on the stone steps until Jinks came to the end of the story I had asked him to tell.

His voice never faltered in its forthrightness. He spoke as steadily as though he were delivering a lecture, and I gave him that kind of careful, unquestioning attendance. I believed the story at once, because I believed something more: that however he had died, Jamie Briggs had been right, had been beautiful.

As he spoke, I could see the room Jinks had seen: a single light burned there, where the acid had left a faint, bitter smell, and Jamie Briggs's narrow fine body lay on the bed where it had flung itself, and hidden its terrible twisted face in the pillow. I could see Mrs. Briggs, her pretty fadedness dazed and broken up by shock and fear; even Chris I could see, with his bright look sobered for once. And there on the table by the bed I could see, as Jinks had seen, the ripped-open envelope with its inscription in that round open hand: "To my dear brother," but nowhere any note, nor any mention of one.

Mrs. Briggs had sworn them all to secrecy, Jinks said, and must have regretted her terrified haste in calling them. But many students knew or had guessed the truth already, and soon the whole little town would have heard it. Such a secret could never be kept, he said; even Dr. Mac's efforts to keep it out of the papers would fail. "By tomorrow," Jinks said, loud and sure, "everyone will know."

He stopped speaking then, and we sat silent on the cold stone steps. More people passed and waved, but they were too far away for us to see their faces. Both of us looked straight ahead, down the driveway to the College gates, where the ivy was beginning to show a little green again.

Then I said, "But *why*, Jinks—why do you think he did it?"

For a long time he didn't answer. Then he said—but in another voice, almost a whisper, as though it shamed him to speak, and already turning away: "I don't know."

III

Sunday my mind distinguished only snatches of, moments from, and over the whole day, the whispering hanging like a pall . . .

I sat with the girls in church in the morning, in the section of the balcony that was our place, and in the balcony across from us were Jamie Briggs's club brothers, sitting straighter and more solemn than usual, conscious of responsibility. Downstairs I could see Dr. Mac in the pew with his family, and around him in rows the townspeople, their faces composed, their hats flowered for spring.

The service had passed the second hymn, and the coins were jingling subduedly in the velvet-lined collection plates. Then the minister stood up to pray, and everyone there knew he would pray for Jamie Briggs. His voice began, and the boys across from us turned their bowed heads to each other significantly, and the girls turned theirs toward Rachel, who looked down at her lap and her folded hands.

"And be with those of our number who are unable to meet with us this morning; comfort and strengthen them in the hour of their bereavement; and receive unto thyself the soul of one, snatched from our midst. . ."

There was the empty pew, on the aisle, where Mrs. Briggs had sat with her two tall sons. But there was no pity for its emptiness in the minister's smooth voice: with a horror that made me raise my head in the midst of the prayer I heard the taunting sibilance that obscured the cautious words, the high breathy snigger that broke like a wave over the townspeople and faculty downstairs and over the students upstairs.

Ja-amie, Ja-amie, Ja-amie Briggs, it seemed to run; ki-illed yourself. Ja-amie, ki-illed yourself And for what shameful reason?

Sunday afternoon I walked by the lake, and the whispering hung there too, like fog in the morning, low over the reedy surface.

The dates went past me on the bridge, hand in hand, slowly, as slowly as the swans went past me in the water. I thought of where they would walk that day, in the fine weather, and of how love would shine in their faces. It seemed certain to me that they loved each other, these boys and girls who kissed on the dark porches at night and clasped hands by the lake in the sun.

At the end of the lake, where the hill started up to the Dorm, I could see the white house where the Briggses lived, and the wreath on the door. For a moment, framed in the wreath I saw Jamie Briggs's memorably smiling face, shining as it had—

In that instant it was clear to me, as it had never been since the phone's ring tore the quiet on Friday night, why Jamie Briggs had died. For what I saw then was his face as I had seen it once the fall before. I had come up the hill in the crisp afternoon, and had seen a little knot of boys on the walk by the Chapel, clustered around someone who knelt there, and laughing. A little apart from them stood Jamie Briggs.

When I got up to them I saw it was his brother Chris they were laughing at. It was Freshman Week, and they were hazing him in the traditional way. He was on his knees before them, his merry face blindfolded, his hands and feet tied, and as I watched he began to twist his body, that was smaller than Jamie's but seemed much stronger, built for use rather than ornament, and to scrub his knees on the cement walk in a movement that took him slowly and ridiculously but steadily along. The boys followed, laughing and cheering him. Then I looked at Jamie Briggs. He still stood off a little and watched his brother's progress with a gleaming, proud look. He wasn't laughing and he had nothing to do with the others: as I watched him he turned away from them and went down the hill alone. But his face had shone with love; that was what I remembered, and it had been to hide the shining that he had killed himself on Friday night.

I looked from the bridge at the houses that lined the road up to the Dorm, and I knew that in each of them people were whispering and clicking their tongues and shaking their heads. "Yes indeed," I could hear them whisper, and nod to confirm themselves, "that eldest Briggs boy was always a strange one. I always said he'd come to harm. Poor Mrs. Briggs," they would sigh and nod again, an avid sympathy brightening their eyes.

Yes, I could see them and hear them whispering in all those houses as I had heard them in church that morning, and as I had lain awake to hear the girls whispering in the hall outside my door the night before, in the hall outside Rachel's closed door. "She said he never kissed her. I wonder if she knows—"

The sun on the lake was blinding me, I wanted to get inside where it was dark, where I couldn't see the lovers or the white house with the wreath, get in out of the whispering. For I didn't know what it was that had been wrong in Jamie Briggs's love for his brother. The words in my mind, the precise categorical terms, were empty of meaning or blame; I knew only that he had been beautiful, had loved beautifully, and it seemed intolerable to me that such beauty should be so meanly remembered.

Sunday night I stood in the upstairs hall of the clubhouse, looking at the closed door of Rachel's room. The others had all gone to church, and Rachel and I were alone in the house.

I walked over and knocked at her door. Her voice was muffled when she called, "Who is it?" and I said, "Ruth," and opened the door and went in.

She was in bed, and the room was dark. She lay on her back, with her arm across her eyes, and I wondered if she had moved from that position since she shut herself in after supper. The whispering had driven her in, I thought.

She wasn't crying and I thought that she hadn't been. As I sat on the bed beside the pyramid her bent knees made under the covers, I was thinking of how it was when she played for Jamie Briggs in Chapel, when they were together in the organ loft above the stage, high up above us like angels in black choir robes. Jamie Briggs always stood very still beside her, and she waited quietly for his nod to begin, and then her hands were swift over the keys and with the stops, and her feet moved surely on the pedals. He stood still before he sang, as if he trusted her.

"Did they all go out?" she asked, and her voice still sounded smothered, though her mouth was uncovered.

"Yes," I said. "They all went."

"I hope they didn't think it was funny, my going to bed so early. If only they wouldn't talk about it all the time—I don't want to talk about it any more."

I said nothing, and after a while she went on.

"Ruth—"

"Yes?"

"You know—you know he didn't just—die, don't you?"

"Yes, I know."

"You know they all say he—did it because he was—you know."

I couldn't answer.

"But Ruth—I don't care what they say about him. He was—a wonderful boy."

I stood up, for what could I reply? How could I say to her, Yes, I know, they are all wrong and only you and I are right, only *we* know what he was, yes, I know.

I wanted to make some gesture, though, so I said, "Will you be all right, Rachel?" and I meant, Will you always be all right, will you always know what you know now?

But she only heard the words and she said, with her eyes still hidden, "Oh yes, I will be. I have to play at the funeral tomorrow. His mother wanted me to."

I said "Good night" then, and went out, closing her door as softly as I could.

When I heard them begin to come in, when the first two came laughing up the steps, I looked at the clock in a panic, for I hadn't thought it was time for them yet. But it was, and I was afraid and knew I was caught, for finally there was nowhere to go to escape them. I had been running away from them for two days, and at last I would have to face them—it was too early to pretend I was asleep, as I had done the night before. So I lay still on the bed and looked at my book.

Before long they were all in my room, half undressed, disordered, their eyes bright. My roommate stood before the mirror in her slip, rubbing cream into her face, and Bess sat on the bed with her mouth full of bobby pins, putting up her hair. Lacey and the others drifted in, and then they began.

"You know, I heard tonight that Mrs. Briggs and Chris are going to move away from town after school closes, and Chris is going to transfer to State next year."

"What a shame! He would have been a cinch to make the varsity next year. At State he won't have a chance."

"I know, but you can't blame Mrs. Briggs much."

"Did you hear those women behind us as we came out to-night?"

"No, what did they say?"

"Oh, you know how they talk. What a scandal it was, and how if Professor Briggs had lived this would never have happened."

"A lot he could have done to stop it."

"Gee, kids, wouldn't you have thought some of the fellows in the club would have *known*—"

"Known what?"

"Well, I mean if Jamie really was a *fairy*, wouldn't they—I mean—"

"Say, did you hear that he left some kind of a note for Chris? Only nobody got to see it."

"Why was it for Chris instead of his mother, for heaven's sake?"

"Why, didn't you know—some of the fellows say Jamie was *queer for his brother*!"

"Oh, how can you say that? Why, Chris is certainly *normal*. You can tell that just to look at him. He wouldn't—"

"But that wouldn't matter, if Jamie—"

They were all whispering again, their faces intent, their eyes like fed fires. I shrank at the head of the bed in the corner, caught, hemmed in; their whispering enveloped me like dreadful music and I knew I would never move, would lie there forever, fascinated, appalled.

Then Bess said, "Ruth, I meant to ask you—did Dr. Mac act funny yesterday morning? Somebody saw him in your office."

I stared at her without answering. Gradually they had all stopped talking and were looking at me.

Then with a painful, sharp sound like that of a rubber band snapping, the spell broke and I moved, I got up and pushed past their burning eyes and ran out into the hall and down the stairs. I heard the slap of my slippers against the steps, and I heard them call after me, and then somebody said in a curious, giggling whisper: "Gosh, I wonder what's the matter with *her*?" And somebody else whispered back, derisive, "Maybe she had a crush on him too!"

Then I couldn't hear them at all, and I stood shivering in my pajamas in the middle of the unlit parlor, thinking over and over, "Oh, don't let them make it like that! Don't let them make it ugly like that! It was *beautiful*!" Thinking, "It was beautiful," over and over, "It was beautiful."

When I came upstairs again, much later, the whispering had stopped for the night and the crack under every door was dark. I went in the bathroom and pulled the light chain and looked in my wild eyes under the bright white glare.

I had set myself against them all, I thought in triumph. When I had reached out to Rachel she had not understood, but when I had run from them they could not have ignored my revolt. They must know, now, that I was against them all: the girls, the whole College, Dr. Mac, the townspeople, even Mrs. Briggs and Chris. They had tried to stain him with their whispering, their sniggering, their ugly words, their frightened secrecy, and I had defied them all, for I had said, He died beautifully, yes, he had a beautiful death, and none of them could soil it for me. None of them, I thought in wildness.

When I pulled the light chain again a great white rose bloomed in the dark where the glare had been, and the chain swung gently against the bulb, tinkling like a song.

IV

It rained the next day, and the funeral was held at eleven in the Chapel.

I got there too late to take my assigned seat, so I stood at the door that led out to the walk and the drive beyond it, where the hearse was parked. The organ had begun already, and I could see Rachel high up in the loft, in her black choir robe, moving her hands and feet swiftly and surely. Sometimes the sound of the rain that came through the open door was louder than the music. But I could hear Dr. Mac as he began the prayer, and I could see the open casket below him on the raised platform behind the altar.

It was not a long service. There were only two speakers, Dr. Mac and Bill, the club president, and both of them spoke briefly of Jamie Briggs's youth and his talent. There were only a few townspeople in the extra seats at the back, but all the students were there although attendance had not been required.

Then the voices stopped and the organ began again. It was raining harder outside, almost covering the scuffling sound as everyone stood up and the six pallbearers went forward and took up the casket. They came toward me down the aisle, all in their best dark suits, walking carefully, their eyes straight in front of them.

I could see, over the flowers then, the face I had thought so beautiful. But the light was gone out of it, of course, and Jamie Briggs looked dead, as dead as any other who had never sung.

The pallbearers went on past me and out into the rain. I turned and watched them going as fast as they could toward the waiting hearse, breaking their stride and hurrying with the heavy thing they carried, before the rain should have beaten the flowers and blurred the careful face death had given him.

It seemed to me in that moment, that the rain had done what I never could have: it had drowned all the whispering, put out all the shame. The students and townspeople were quiet as they came out of the Chapel, after the hearse and the funeral cars had driven away. I searched their faces for a sign of scorn, but there was none; only some of them were crying.

What was the knowledge, unremitting, that bruised me as they passed? Was it that my own innocence had finally been deliberate—and *perverse*, to call this reality beautiful, congruous, inviolable, when this reality was, instead, a deadly trick, a bitter quirk? Or was my knowledge simpler: that what was beautiful, what could not be stained, had after all, been brought to nothing now.

I cannot tell, any more. But when I walked after the silent others out into the rain, it felt heavy falling on my head and shoulders. And then, at last, I could mourn.

THE IRRELEVANT INSTRUCTOR

John F. Matthews

JEFFERSON P. MIMBLE was an instructor at the University. His name was listed in the catalogue as one of six instructors in Economics. He taught two courses, Economics I and Economics I(a). I(a) was for people who were not intelligent enough to pass Economics I.

Mr. Mimble had been an instructor for seven years. He was an ambitious man, and had reason to believe that someday he might get to be an associate professor. In the years of limbo through which most men must pass, Jefferson Mimble lived quietly in a little flat near the University, gave his classes a quiz at the end of each week, and indulged in a movie and three glasses of beer every Saturday night.

One Friday morning in early spring, Jefferson Mimble returned the quiz-papers from the preceding week to the members of I(a). Each paper was carefully graded, and bore a few pedagogical comments in the margin, neatly printed in red ink. As was his custom, Mimble had pinned to each paper the questions which made up the examination for the new week. "Last week's efforts, with this week's problems," he always said as he handed out the papers.

Mimble enjoyed calling the names of his students, and dispensing the sheets on which his judgments were recorded. He pronounced each name clearly and objectively, waited until the student approached the big desk at the front of the classroom, and then said, "Your paper, sir, good work," or perhaps, "Your paper, sir, not up to standard."

On this particular morning the mechanical process of starting the examination went off even more smoothly than usual. From Anderson to Schwartz, the papers were passed from pedagogue to pupil with one or the other of the two possible comments. Only one slip occurred—a pupil named G. Thompson was absent—but from Thompson to Zillich there were no more adventures.

During the quiz, as forty young heads bowed to the task, Jefferson P. Mimble sat proudly and trustingly at his desk. For a few moments he glanced at Thompson's unclaimed paper, trying to think of a clever way to make the boy ashamed of having missed the inevitable Friday quiz. Growing tired of this, he slipped the paper into his brief-case and turned to the careful study of a popular economic journal. At no time did he raise his head to seek out cheaters in the class. It was his firm conviction that scoundrels are developed by suspicion, and that honesty is best encouraged by faith.

Finally the hour ended, and he collected the papers. A few students paused to ask him a question or two about the quiz, and then he was left alone in the empty classroom. Gathering his equipment into his arms, Jefferson Mimble retired to his office to look over the freshly composed quizzes.

In his office, Mimble lit his pipe and settled down to discover error. As usual I(a) had demonstrated its collective inability to master the subject of economics, and paper after paper received its baptism of red ink. Mimble's pipe went out, but he did not bother to relight it. Earnestly he uncovered ignorance, and diligently he exposed general stupidity among his students.

Suddenly he came upon an unexpected paper. At the bottom of an almost illegible page of mistakes was scrawled the unmistakable name of G. Thompson. But G. Thompson had been absent, had received no questions, could not possibly have written the paper! Mimble hastily looked in his brief-case, to make sure that Thompson had really been absent. There was no mistake. The unclaimed paper was there, and with it the questions of the day.

Mimble found that he could not recall Thompson's appearance. There were so many students in his classes that it was impossible to connect all the names with all the faces. He made a mental note to speak to Thompson on the following Monday. Versatility was a good thing, but Mimble felt that it was not quite proper for a student to be present and absent at the same time.

He did not finish marking the remaining papers. He decided to go home and take a nap before dinner, and not to think about anything until the next day.

II

After dinner, Mimble called Miss Myra Napp on the telephone, and asked her what she was doing. Miss Napp replied that she was preparing to read a good book, and asked him what

he was doing. Mr. Mimble replied that he was thinking of reading a good book. Miss Napp wondered whether he would like to come over to her house, where they could read their good books together, and Mr. Mimble agreed that this would be a very nice idea.

Jefferson P. Mimble often wondered about Myra Napp. She was twenty-seven years old, and had been the star-performer in numerous amateur dramatic productions. She never went on the professional stage, however, because she did not like the crude life of the commercial actress. Instead, she was satisfied to teach theatrical arts to the University Players.

Myra was a plump, pretty girl, with a wonderful, magical voice. Mimble could not recall anything she had ever said, but he never forgot the delicacy and charm with which she said it.

He was under the impression that she was a Puritan. He was always very careful of his moral aspect when he was with her, and tried to act as though he had never heard any dirty stories. If they read a particularly scandalous book together, he always pointed out to her that it involved some valid ethical protest.

Although he thought of her as exclusively moral, Mimble was perplexed by the fact that she liked to dance, and that when dancing she always shook her shoulders in the conventional manner of the burlesque chorus. Mimble had always had trouble controlling his passion for women, but with Myra he was always respectful. He was even respectful when he kissed her, and a little ashamed for being so vulgar as to kiss her at all. But she never resented his respectful kisses. Indeed, she always kissed him in return, passionately, violently, without any restraint—which made him feel all the more ashamed of himself. Sometimes he felt that all the chastity was on his side, and he could not understand. Secretly, he was afraid of Myra.

After carefully shaving himself, and changing into a clean shirt, Jefferson Mimble went to visit Myra Napp. She was almost excessively glad to see him, as usual, and as usual he felt a little uncomfortable about her delight. They talked for a moment about the delightful spring weather, and then sat quietly together on the porch, reading their good books. After it grew dark, Mimble suggested that they go inside and play a game of cards.

Mimble was a great card player. He was never able to decide whether his unfailing success at cards was the result of his own skill, or simply of amazing good luck, but he never lost. With a few masculine friends he played for small stakes, but he never

told this to Myra. With her, he played simply for the pleasure of winning.

They played casino, and he won consistently. Myra did not seem to mind losing, and always seemed confident that she would win the next hand. Occasionally he made mistakes on purpose, to let her win for a change, but she always managed to lose in the end. They played for several hours without interruption, scarcely bothering to speak to each other. Finally Myra suggested that they stop for a moment while she prepared a little luncheon, and left Mimble playing solitaire while she made some sandwiches.

Mimble always won at solitaire. Tonight he decided to make three mistakes, three obvious errors which would make the ultimate victory a little more difficult. After failing to play an important card for the third straight time, he found himself confronted with a problem. It seemed that he had at last got himself into a situation from which all his skill and luck could not extricate him.

He stared at the cards spread out before him, puzzling over how to play the rest of the hand. In the kitchen he could hear Myra, slicing bread and pouring out glasses of grape-juice. "How is your game coming?" she called. "Are you winning again?"

Gloomily he gazed at the cards. This time he had got himself into something beyond his powers. He was not winning, and it was plain that he would not be able to win. "No," he replied, "I've got myself tangled up here, and there's no getting out of it."

In the kitchen Myra laughed. "Come on out here and help me carry the things in," she said, "And leave the cards on the table as they are—I want to see this. Any time you can't think your way out of a problem at cards, I want to see it."

Mimble took one last look at the cards, and went into the kitchen. The glasses of grape-juice had been placed on a tray, along with napkins, dishes and silver-ware. "Take the tray," said Myra, "and I'll bring the rest of the things."

They went into the living-room, and Myra walked directly to the card-table. "This should be written down in history," she said, teasingly. "You—losing at cards!"

She peered at cards for a moment, and then looked up oddly at Mimble. For a moment he felt ashamed, as though he had done something very silly and very bad. "Peculiar humor, your's," said Myra, almost bitterly.

Jefferson P. Mimble glanced uncomfortably at the table. The cards were neatly played out, and the game was obviously won.

When he had left the room, there had been a disorderly sprawl of cards, a hopeless chaos of impossibility. Now there was only the remnant of an easy victory.

"I hadn't won when I left the room," he said lamely.

"Of course not," smiled Myra cynically. "Of course you hadn't. The cards played themselves out while you were gone! Certainly!"

"Well," said Mible apologetically, "they must have!"

They ate their sandwiches in the dining-room. Mible did not want to disturb anything at the card-table, and suggested that the dining-room table was bigger, and would be easier to eat on. They always ate at the card-table, but Myra did not object. They ate in silence, and Mible felt that Myra was angry with him.

When they had finished, Mible helped wash the dishes, and then said that he was tired. Myra agreed that she was tired too, and did not object when he asked her to get his coat. He did not kiss her good-night, not even the usual chaste, respectable touch of lips which was their usual farewell. He thanked Myra for a nice evening, and she thanked him for a nice evening, and he went out into the night.

It was cool, and the night-air was an echo of the winter which had passed. Mible walked swiftly through the deserted streets. It was only eleven o'clock, yet he saw no one in the streets; he did not even see a single car. The houses, built close against the sidewalk, loomed ugly and empty, as though they had been drained of humanity. Mible hastened his steps, and finally arrived at the building in which he lived.

He had trouble unlocking the door to his flat. The key did not seem to fit. Finally, however, the door swung open unexpectedly, and he stumbled into the little flat which he called his home. He was strangely exhausted, and, after taking off his shoes, lay down on the bed and fell instantly to sleep.

III

It was late afternoon when Mible awoke, and the sun was gleaming redly in the western sky. Mible rubbed his forehead cautiously. He felt as though he had been wandering in a fiery desert for a long time; his lips were dry and feverish, and his whole body throbbed with a sterile anguish. Slowly he raised himself into a sitting position, and discovered that he was still fully dressed. Irritably he took off his socks, and slipped his burning feet into his bedroom slippers.

For several minutes he sat staring dully at the floor, then got up and went into the bathroom. Leaving his clothes in a pile on the floor, he stepped into the shower. The steaming rush of water pounded his body with innumerable soothing little pellets. The rhythmic fall, repeating itself endlessly in his ears, relaxed his taut nerves, and he was suddenly very happy. He soaked for an hour, with the steam swirling about his head, his eyes closed in sheer appreciation of sensual bliss. The discomfort of his awakening slipped from him, and the confused emptiness of his mind was softened into pleasant awareness.

He shaved, dressed himself in clean clothing, and sat down on the side of his bed to smoke. The events of the preceding day came back to him, and he thought of several pleasant ways to make his peace with Myra. He could not understand why she had become angry with him, nor was he even sure that she *had* been angry. The problem did not seem worth troubling about. As he stared into the grey patterns of smoke curling up from his pipe, Jefferson Mimble took a sudden decision. It was Saturday, the day which he always concluded with a movie and three glasses of beer. "I shall go straight to the saloon," he said aloud, "and drink all evening."

Standing suddenly erect, he surveyed himself in the mirror. "I may become drunk," he said to the image in the glass, "which would make *you* drunk too, my friend. It has been a long time since we have been drunk, eh Mimble?" He smiled at the repetitious figure in the glass, and noticed that the mirror was slightly warped in one corner. He waggled his fingers in front of the warped place, and was delighted to watch the configurate distortion of the image.

He felt somehow masterful and heroic, as though he had set himself upon the course of mighty deeds. He made another decision—to eat no dinner, but to begin his drinking on an empty stomach. He was not hungry, and the thought of food paled before the delights of amber beer. Since it was too early to go to the saloon, he sat down and read some articles by a colleague of his in the Economics department.

At about seven o'clock he threw down the magazine which he had been reading, put on his spring topcoat, and prepared to go out. He carefully inspected all the windows in the flat, made certain that they were all securely fastened, and then went out, locking the door behind him with a triumphant twist of the key. It was an evening of late sunlight and mist, a glorious, mischievous evening, full of mingled light and shadow. Briskly he walk-

ed to The Golden Clock, where he was accustomed to have his Saturday evening beer.

The Golden Clock was almost empty. Irvine, the bartender, was pensively mopping the bar with a greasy rag, and chewing a gigantic cigar with a thoughtful motion of his heavy jaws. When Mimble came in, Irvine stuffed the rag into the pocket of his apron, and shifted the cigar into a position of greeting. "Back so soon?" said Irvine.

"I'm a little early, yes," replied Mimble exultantly. "I decided there was no use waiting until I'd seen a movie to have my beer tonight. As a matter of fact, I feel very much like drinking a good deal."

"You're getting to be a regular soak," grinned Irvine approvingly. "Last night, and then again this evening . . . Do you good, though."

"What do you mean—last night?" asked Mimble. He began to feel a little uneasy, and he stopped smiling. "I wasn't in here last night."

Irvine laughed understandingly. "O.K., if you say so. You needn't worry, though—I won't tell any of the University big-shots."

"Look here, my friend," Mimble barked shortly, "I spent last evening with a lady-friend of mine, playing cards. I never come in here on Fridays, anyway."

"I know," said Irvine, "But you certainly were here last night, as big as you please—Friday night or no Friday night. Maybe you thought it was Saturday or something. You teachers are so blamed absent-minded you probably can't even keep your drinking straight. Did you get home all right last night?"

Jefferson Mimble cautiously opened his collar. "Ha ha," he laughed weakly, "sure I got home all right." He gulped down a glass of strong beer. "Look here, Irvine," he said apologetically, "I've been having a little trouble with my memory. I don't remember last night very clearly . . . man to man—what did I do?"

Irvine took out his greasy rag and began to polish the bar again. "Why, you just got drunk, that's all. Sat over there in the corner and got drunk. Once in a while you tried to sing to yourself, and I must say, Mr. Mimble, you don't have a good voice."

"No," admitted Mimble, struck by the unsuspected musical acuteness of the man, "I guess I don't sing very well." He did not think about anything except the discovery that Irvine was a music critic. Carefully he made himself think about this, and nothing else. For a few moments he remained standing at the

bar, staring at Irvine. "I think I'll go sit at the corner table, like . . . like I did last night," he said finally.

He walked unsteadily to the little table in the corner of the saloon, and sat down. Stubbornly he addressed himself to his beer. He thought about the spring weather, he thought about Myra Napp and how she would not like to see him here drinking by himself. He thought about several dirty jokes which he had overheard his students telling one another, and he thought about the color of his beer. Irvine supplied the beer plentifully, in large shiny glasses, and Mimbble thought about the glasses. Brutally he beat down the bewilderment which hovered in the back of his mind, and for several hours he drank with dogged persistence. Yet however much he hated to admit it, he did not seem to be getting drunk.

After some time the door of The Golden Clock swung open to permit the entrance of two young teachers from the University, the first patrons to arrive since Mimbble had seated himself. Seeing their colleague at the table, they came up to him with smiles. "Well, Mimbble, celebrating already?"

He looked at them, smiling down at him as though . . . he felt suddenly afraid and very small. "Sit down," he said, "Have some beer."

They promptly obeyed his request, and began to congratulate him. "That lecture this morning was one of the clearest, most intelligent things I've ever heard," said the younger man, who was an instructor in Philosophy.

"Yes," said the second man, who taught mathematics, "Everybody was impressed by the way you went at the problem. You certainly have a nice command of figures."

Mimbble nodded sadly. It suddenly occurred to him that he had been supposed to read a paper for the Faculty Club that morning. He had spent several weeks getting his speech ready, and then he had slept through the whole day. He had forgotten the engagement, completely and totally. A great deal had depended upon that paper—the higher members of the faculty chose their successors largely on the basis of opinions expressed in papers read at the Faculty Club. He had hoped to make a good impression with his paper, so that he might improve his position at the University. And instead he had slept—the paper was unread!

"Really," said the man from Philosophy, "I shouldn't be surprised to see you made a full professor on the strength of that paper."

"Nor I," added the mathematician. "The President said he knew of no other man who could have done such a nice piece of work. He was very pleased."

Mimble ordered a round of beers for all of them, and tried to look modest. They were not fooling him, and there was no satire in their voices. They really *had liked* his paper. Their compliments showered around him with the sudden violence of a spring storm, and drink followed drink in celebration of his victory. Some graduate students and a few more faculty men came in, and there was much sonorous congratulation, much academic levity.

Finally the others left, and Mimble sat alone at his table. The adulation of his friends had made him a little giddy—or perhaps it was the beer. But at the back of his mind was the nagging thought that he really had not read any paper for the Faculty Club. He had been stretched out upon his bed with his clothes on. He felt very drunk, and he did not know whether he ought to laugh or cry. He did both, taking turns at laughing, then crying. At last, he slid under the table.

IV

For five days he did not leave The Golden Clock. Whenever he recovered consciousness he climbed back on his chair and ordered more beer. He drank steadily and energetically until at last he slipped back into the shadows of drunkenness beneath the corner table. For five days he drank great volumes of liquor, and Irvine did not protest his sleeping on the floor. From time to time he left his corner to descend into the basement, to relieve himself in the subteranean wash-room, but the rest of his hours were spent at or under the corner table.

The basement washroom was a hideous little closet in one corner of The Golden Clock's cellar. As his system weakened under the ravages of continued drunkenness, Mimble found it more and more difficult to make his way up out of the basement. The steps were steep and rickety, and his whirling senses transformed the ascent into a major exercise in self-control. Sometimes he reeled around the damp cellar in great circles, unable even to find the steps which led him back up to the bar-room.

Every day some of the men from the University came into The Golden Clock. They always ate at Mimble's table, and they did not seem to notice that he was always drunk. Each noon there was the usual academic chatter, the usual joking about the students, the usual dissertation on abstract intellectual themes.

His friends kept congratulating him. They drank his health for having published an article in the *Journal of Economics*; they toasted him for a motion he proposed at a faculty meeting; they honored him for being chosen to head the Committee on Graduate Examinations. And finally, they conveyed to him their great joy at hearing of his engagement to Miss Myra Napp.

Mechanically through those five dreadful days he shared their gladness. His glassy eyes peered wonderingly at their faces through an alcoholic haze, and his heart tensed with fear that they might discover his secret. What if they should ever find out that he did not leave *The Golden Clock*? What would happen to his sudden success if it were known that he had not been near the University in nearly a week? He was drunk and afraid, and he drank deeply to forget.

By Thursday evening Mimble was exhausted with the strain of drinking and pretense. He stumbled down the steps which led to the washroom, weaving unsteadily on the rickety stairs. His mind was too numb to direct the actions of his feet, and he fell heavily onto the damp floor of the cellar. Wearily he tried to raise himself, but the delicate adjustment of control had vanished. Squirming and wriggling, he only managed to drag himself deeper into the dark recesses of the cellar. The stone floor tore at his flesh, but the pain was unnoticed in his rising panic. His clothing was saturated with perspiration, and icy beads of sweat traced their chill paths down his back. He felt as though invisible hands were clutching at him, and the blackness of the unlighted cellar was filled with horror.

In his drunken madness, Mimble screamed—but the cellar was deep. His shrill, frantic cries were unheard in the bar-room above, and his convulsive terror expended itself in vain lamentation.

Finally exhaustion triumphed over fear, and he lay quietly in the darkness, a huddled figure of desolation. The chill atmosphere of the cellar began to sober him, and he realized, in some inner chamber of his mind, that he had not prepared the Friday quiz for his classes.

After an hour or so, Mimble was able to drag himself to his feet. Uncertainly he approached the stairs which led up to the bar-room, and slowly he pulled himself up step by step until he reached the top. In the bright glare of the bar-room lights, he saw with dismay the wretched state of his clothing, and he wept to himself. He waved a pale, bruised hand to Irvine, who was

polishing the bar with a greasy rag, and passed staggering out of The Golden Clock.

Nobody ever saw him again. But on the other hand, nobody missed him. Somebody gave the Friday quiz, and who would have doubted it was Mimble? Somebody married Myra Napp, and if it were not really Mimble, what difference?

In the world of Jefferson P. Mimble, the parts were interchangeable.

THE RAILWAY ACCIDENT

Allen Chalmers

FOREWORD

*Anyone who happens to be familiar with my autobiographical book, *Lions and Shadows*, need not bother to read what I am going to write here. For *Lions and Shadows* is, among other things, a detailed introduction to *The Railway Accident* and to 'Allen Chalmers,' its author. Chalmers—as I shall call him from now on, omitting the quotation-marks—is known by his real name as a distinguished British prose-writer, not yet as widely popular as his admirers could wish, but profoundly and subtly influential. His pseudonym is attached to this story at his own request, for reasons which I shall mention in a moment.*

When Chalmers and I were undergraduates together at Cambridge, in the mid nineteen-twenties, we invented a fantastic village which we called Mortmere. Mortmere was a sort of anarchist paradise in which all accepted moral and social values were turned upside down and inside out, and every kind of extravagant behaviour was possible and usual. It was our private place of retreat from the rules and conventions of university life.

*We wrote many stories about Mortmere—entirely for our own amusement—and created a lot of Mortmere characters, nearly all of whom appear in *The Railway Accident*, often quite casually referred to, like old friends. This is no place to describe their various peculiarities and adventures; they are all set forth in *Lions and Shadows*. And *The Railway Accident* doesn't need such annotation. It can stand alone, as a complete, self-explanatory work of art.*

Written in 1928, it is the last and longest of the Mortmere stories—a farewell to Mortmere, which left Chalmers free to develop his extraordinary technique in other, more fruitful directions. Nevertheless, Mortmere was the mad nursery in which

Chalmers grew up as a writer, and no future evaluation of his work will be able to ignore it.

Perhaps *The Railway Accident* can best be described as a dream, or a nightmare, about the English. Gunball, Welken and Shreeve are all dream-distortions of classic English types. At moments, they seem nearly normal, nearly convincing; and they appear to be taking each other quite seriously. But this is only a part of their basic social pretense. Life in Mortmere is like a poker-game between telepathists, in which everybody is bluffing and nobody is fooled. We, too, in the everyday world, have our social pretenses. For us, too, there are fantastic realities which we conspire to ignore. The Railway Accident may, therefore, be regarded as a satire. But it is something more than that; it has an extra dimension. It is, so to speak, a satire on satire, a parody of parody. Satire requires a norm, a sane observer, a standard of contrast. Where can we find one here? Hearn, the 'I' of the narrative, is just as crazy as the people he describes. Indeed, he may be crazier—for we begin to suspect that this entire journey and its sequel may be taking place only in his own imagination. Even his style of narration has the splendor and oddity of madness. The purple passages are just a little too purple, the seemingly-reasonable dialogues often run abruptly into a blank non sequitur. And there are strange sly echoes of Proust, Joyce and Henry James which suggest an anarchic mockery of all literary values whatsoever.

Today, Chalmers is inclined to disown Mortmere and his share in its saga—hence his wish to appear under a pseudonym. He feels that the kind of literature which makes a diletante cult of violence, sadism, bestiality and sexual acrobatics is peculiarly offensive and subversive in an age such as ours—an age which has witnessed the practically applied bestiality of Belsen and Dachau. I respect this scruple, and I agree with it on general principles. But I do not agree that it covers the case of *The Railway Accident*. Indeed, *The Railway Accident* seems to me to be fundamentally anti-sadistic, anti-pornographic. Its ludicrous exaggerations, its antiseptic spirit of parody, its innocent extravagance produce an atmosphere in which the real sadist suffocates for lack of hatred and the real pornographer is revealed as a dreary little bore. And so we must admit a paradox: this insane story is, after all, a touchstone of sanity. It will be best understood and appreciated by those who, like its author, are most immune from the infectious evils of our neurotic epoch.

Christopher Isherwood

THE RAILWAY ACCIDENT

"One more."

"Thanks no, really."

But Gunball had already signalled with a slow regardless movement of his forefinger to the girl wheeling a dumb-waiter on rubber tires quietly through the tin wailing of milk-cans and the drawl of trolleys. I leant on the wood of the lowered carriage window, observing with the sharpened pleasure of an anticipated farewell the metropolitan morning striking through risen straw specks, dust of horse dung, beneath the glass arch of the Terminus roof. A horse-drawn mail-van flickered red at the interestices of the platform barrier, there was frost in the air and I had, not intellectually but sensationally, a conviction of warmth which remembrance of the falsely tender coaching lithographs in Gunball's sitting-room would not have destroyed, since they would have been irrelevant to what seemed an impression quite unassociated with the past. Beyond the barrier a soldier in khaki carrying full marching kit was watching one of the horses. Another soldier had passed the ticket collector and had begun to walk up the platform. More were coming.

"What's the idea, I wonder?"

"Idea or no, the whole pack of them are getting on your train," said Gunball. He carried two cups of coffee. I took both while he fetched out a flask from one of his angler's pockets.

"You'll need it. There's a nip in the air this morning. Spring-cleaning the gravestones. Well, I wish I were you. Give them all my love and tell them how sorry I am to miss the Treasure Hunt. My word, you'd not know we were in sight of the first of May."

Nevertheless he wore no overcoat, seemed warm, and I recognized in his remark that advertisement, blatant or discreet, of the power of the weather which is necessary to most sportsmen who have left the country even for a few hours. Through the roof panes the sun froze whey-white on steam columns from the waiting engines. Other insignia of the bogus, curt and modern cathedral ceremony which in my daydream, induced partly by the cold, I had begun to arrange were the reverberating stammer of slipping driving-wheels on suburban trains and the fussing haste of porters loading the guard's van with wooden crates. Outside the station the air would be warm and I should remember clock-golf in the rectory garden, or there would be heavy snow recalling the voluntarily ascetic life I had often planned: there would be crocuses or vultures, it would not be the same as it

was here. Immediately the train started everything would be changed.

"Just like the rector to have forgotten where he'd hidden the thing."

"And then to have lost the plans."

"Isn't it?" He guffawed, without spite. "All the same, beggared if I'd travel up there myself on a day like this *solely* in order to remind him. Besides, we could have done that by wire." He smiled, ostentatiously shrewd. "Who's the skirt?"

"Oh, the barmaid's Angora rabbit. Well, I'll remember to give him that message in your words."

"Which?"

"Try squinting under the damp beehive in the summer-house."

"All right: but don't harp on it for too long or he'll get fussed with the idea that one of the competitors might overhear you."

"Anyway, what exactly is the treasure this year?"

"An ivory papercutter. Given by Henry Belmare. Good thing you took a first-class ticket. By the time they've loaded on the China Expeditionary Force, or whoever they are, there won't be room for a dry hug in the whole train."

"I suppose Anthony Belmare's term won't have begun yet."

"Probably not. That's another reason why I'm not over keen to be at the hunt. The boy's all right, of course. It's the effect he seems to have on the others that I don't fancy. Shreeve and Wherry prancing about and imagining they're school kids again. Ten to one someone'll get a cricket stump pushed through his eyeball. Of course, I'm exaggerating but that's the kind of thing. You've got the carriage to yourself. You'll find chocolates in that newspaper and here's my reserve flask. Think that's gunpowder they're shoving into the van? There'll be meringues for tea if I know the rector's baker. My, I've a good mind to chuck up this shooting in the Black Forest and take a snooze on those cushions. Heads or tails, heads—tails, as it happens. Well, perhaps after all if it had been heads and I'd bought a ticket, something else would have gone against me; Griever might have got hydrophobia. Porter!"

"Yes, sir."

"Just take a look in at this window for a moment. No, not over there; it's this corner, I mean. Anything attract your attention?"

"I don't think so, sir."

"You couldn't suggest a certain rearrangement?"

"Well, sir, there's those golf clubs on the edge of the rack."

"Oh, those are safe enough. Mr. Hearn's not off for a sea voyage. But you might have noticed that the heating pipes are under the right hand seat and that a suitcase placed against them is sure to protrude a few more inches than it would from under the seat on the left hand side. You don't expect Mr. Hearn to rub his ankles against that during the whole journey. Well, make a note of it. Myself, I've always found it a good plan before breakfast every morning to rehearse in my mind what I intend to do during the day; it lessens the chance of small oversights. Ah, one thing more: if you could procure an extra rug from somewhere I'll see you get a couple of pints for lunch. It's none too warm this morning by God."

"What with the heater on and three rugs I shan't feel it much unless I pop off to sleep after ten miles." I again glanced past him to watch a long corridor train with restaurant and sleeping cars which had drawn up on the opposite side of the platform. I should have taken a no more detailed mental photograph of it than most poets do of elaborate architecture if I had not been able to give it a place immediately in one of those non-technical elastic classifications, which alone satisfied my intelligence, of objects describable only by their effects on persons. My first thought was of a day spent in a racing motor-boat on a very calm sea. But the coaches, which seemed of a new triple bogie pattern crouched on concealed springs, were too heavily built, almost armored, to sustain the image, and I remembered the picture in an illustrated journal of a man-carrying rocket designed by some scientific advertiser to be fired towards the moon from a gun. My instantaneous caricature of my own impression spoilt my chances of discovering what it really was; but there could be no doubt of the interest displayed by a middle-aged man wearing a plaid overcoat in the couplings and buffers between two of the coaches most nearly opposite my window. He was testing them with the end of a walking-stick. He turned, rapped heavily with his boot against the incurve of the coachwork, which I then knew to be what I had not supposed from distant inspection, cast steel. I remembered the face of George Wherry, architect to the Mortmere Rural Council, but was not sure that I had identified him.

"All those rats," Gunball said, not explaining that he meant the soldiers, small cockneys with bow legs and peg teeth who now occupied the platform in groups from end to end of the train.

Wherry had finished his examination and had entered one of the restaurant cars. His face barely above the level of the

lowest part of the embrasure peered from an oblong window. Like an electrically moved cardboard football in a sport's outfitter's window it shifted almost surprisingly without revolving, devoid as cardboard of animation, towards the left hand or rear-most corner of the window, then passed out of sight. The cast steel coachwork was painted grey, studded at intervals with visible rivet heads such as one sees on girder bridges or in the saloons of smaller paddle-steamers. Less space than I thought usual had been allowed for the windows. The panes, which seemed dark, were on the streamline principle, distinctly curved inwards towards a roof surmounted by scarcely projecting cone ventilators. However, I hardly supposed that the coaches were lit by gas and I wondered why ventilation could not have been obtained, as it usually is, through superimposed movable hatches above the windows. My impression of most details in the design of this train was that they were unnecessary or, if necessary, belonging to a world in which I should have felt as wholly disorientated as though, suffering from amnesia after an accident, I had found myself among hoardings bearing futurist German advertisements. I pictured myself leaning over a level crossing gate watching trains; I could not see this train pass until I altered the scene to weak moonlight with ravines and a sharp curve in the line allowing me to include all the coaches in a single and close view. Very long, tubular, dead, they turned with mournful speed at the bend, did not sway, plunged into the red earth and tree-roots of a landslip, emerged with the ease of a saw. Chambers of oblivion in which not one of the passengers returned to consciousness until a porter opening the carriage door shouted that the train had reached its destination.

"So I suppose this one will go there too," I heard Gunball say.

"Where? Which one?"

"The train you're leaning out of at the moment. To Mortmere. But I was just saying I'd noticed that the other one certainly does. Look at that end coach; you don't see many of those on the main lines."

It would have been too late to change. An eddy of hustling soldiers clashing water-bottles, trenching-tools, ration-tins, flooded between myself and Gunball who, like a bather surprised in the middle of a facetious gesture by a heavy wave, was scarcely able to shout: "Anyway, yours will arrive somewhere." A whistle blew with vicious sharpness, the train had started, the guard had rerolled his flag and vaulted on to the running-board of the luggage van. Then only, glancing through shifting gaps in the thinned but still racing groups of soldiers who had not yet been

able to mount the train, was I convinced that the carriage which Gunball had designated was certainly of the out-of-date refitted type usually employed on the Mortmere slip-line. The narrow high body-design, compared with that of the preceding corridor coaches, had the topheaviness and antique lines of an extended sedan chair, but it suggested also that this carriage could have negotiated very deep cuttings where the brambles had been neglected for years by the rural officials and where, as I indolently began to imagine, the signalman's eye must not be distracted by the vivid colors of fresh paint moving among the trees. If my train did not go to Mortmere I could get another the next day, or Welken might guess what had happened and send his car. The first gasometers, restful, solemn like stumps of semi-amputated breasts, curved past the window in frost-bright air. Wireless poles and drying pants in soot-black gardens with mustard and cress sprouting from window boxes would soon follow. Now for many months of complete summer I should idle in gardens warm with croquet and the tinkling of spoons, shadowed by yews. Naked bathing would be usual and the rector would fish for pike off log-rafts. Only the King may shoot swans. Do you eat mango salad, Mr. Hearn? Yes, oh yes, certainly yes, though I have not ever, I now will.

"Fond of poetry?"

"I say, I'm frightfully sorry, I mean I'd no idea there was anyone else in the carriage."

"Hadt'n't you, ah ha. Well, I'll admit I slipped in rather on the quiet. Part of my trade you know. Otherwise you could never be sure what they weren't doing in the dormitories."

By chance I recognized him as Gustave Shreeve, but I knew that he did not know me and that it was only his exceptional self-conceit which made him forget that he wore no visible decoration to show that he was head-master of Frisbald College. His large ears protruded almost at right angles to his temples—always a sign, to my mind, of an assertive, fussy temperament. He brought down a small suit-case from the rack, searched with vicious haste in the pockets of his country overcoat, mustard-brown and reminiscent of frosty afternoons on the touchline, for a pencil. He drew a fairly straight line freehand on a writing pad which he had produced from the case, stopped, glanced up to speak.

"Are you for Mortmere?"

"Yes."

"Ah so am I."

"Good, then I'm right after all."

"Well, I see we've managed to secure a carriage in the safest part of the train." I supposed he meant the rear. He laughed like a clergyman who has made a joke about a subject in which secretly he is seriously interested; then as if regretting his perhaps after all risky levity he added didactically: "The safest part of any *long-distance* train."

"You're not a keen railway traveller, perhaps?" I asked with deference.

"Very keen indeed. Of course I was joking just now. I'd as soon take my luck in the cab of the engine. Set me down anywhere on the track between here and Mortmere and I guarantee I'll tell you to within a sixteenth of a mile where I am. And not many regular travellers could do that. You know, speaking quite seriously, I believe there is nothing in this world of ours which if regarded from the right angle will not seem vitally interesting."

"Yes, that's what I've always felt."

"Yet you yourself," he went on with approval, "must already have knocked up against persons who can find nothing more intelligent to do during long railway journeys than sleep or read a novel."

"I know."

"Or play some footling card game on a mackintosh."

"Not much chance of those chaps next door doing that."

"Ah, why's that?"

"Well, look what a crowd of them there was at the station."

"That's so," he agreed with noticeable eagerness. "Wonder who they are. Market gardeners, perhaps."

"No, it's the troops I was thinking of."

"What do you mean, troops?"

"You know, all that gang on the platform."

"Ah, but they didn't get on to this train," he informed me. "In fact, I should hardly expect to find troops travelling at all today, but if they did you can be pretty sure they would go by the other one, which is considerably the faster."

"Then I'm afraid things have changed since you last came this way. Look at that door." I pointed to the varnished partition separating the third from the first class section of the corridor. "Well, I'll wager my return fare that that bulge in the upper panel isn't caused by the damp. Besides you must have seen them boarding the train when it started. The only thing I can't understand is why they're all keeping so quiet."

"Probably you were misled, quite naturally, by seeing a few regulars giving their friends in this train, civilians of course, a good old military send-off."

"Surely you can't have helped noticing at least one of them getting into the carriage next door to this—or next door to wherever you were when we left the station? It isn't as though their boots were soled with velvet."

"Oh, I arrived pretty late, a last moment dash in fact, too late to have noticed my own daughter if she'd been there. But the fundamental point is this: You'll always find that troops, if they are present in any number, travel by express."

"Well, if you arrived late I can't help feeling that that's just the time when you'd have had a very good chance of seeing them with your own eyes."

"Excuse me, but this isn't the fast train."

A terse crash of glass from the hidden corridor proved me right. Organized deafening laughter announced the success of some well-prepared booby-trap. At last they had begun. Hob-nails rasped against varnish, rifles fell, a choir using toilet paper and combs played the first bars of the Forfarshire Stallion. The communication cord suddenly sagged, hung in a slackening useless loop.

"Lord. Well that's judgment with costs all right. So I suppose this must be the fast train after all."

"Fast be damned," he said with excessive vehemence. "I'm sorry, but if you took the interest in railways that I happen to do you wouldn't make a statement like that quite so casually. I can tell you that alterations in the scheduled times aren't made over the breakfast table. If they are, well, God help us."

"I know. Ten minutes late for an appointment and you lose a rattling good post in the colonies which would have made you for life."

"GUARD."

"Good God, what's happened?"

"GUARD."

"Well, sir, I can't stand much nearer."

"Of course this isn't the fast train, eh?"

"No sir, you're right."

"There you are." Shreeve turned to me, less with triumph than with an absurd relief.

"Well, it seems the subject of our discussion has undergone an important alteration. The only statement of yours which I disputed was that there were no troops on this train."

"Ah, I can see you are in the legal profession. It's a clever point. But I'm afraid the judge in this case is too old to lose sight of the issue. By the way, Guard, how is it that these soldiers have been planted on us at the last moment?"

"Change in the orders I suppose, sir."

"But doesn't the Company raise any objections to this kind of thing?" I pointed towards the dangling communication cord.

"They get reparations, sir. Of course, we've come to expect trouble from these Territorials by now. The worst lot in the country. Colonel Moxon's English Rifles: though I believe Major Wherry has the command this Summer as they say the C.O. has gone abroad."

"I saw Wherry in the other train," I said absently.

The Guard's information exhumed no memories in Shreeve's mind. He seemed pleased, had an idea. The lax introverted smile of a nervous fisherman suddenly successful after hours of tension in a tripper's pierhead competition. He brought out an enamelled pencil-sharpener barnacled with small wads of blotting paper, hair balls, husks of chicken food, from a waistcoat pocket, and used it rapidly on the pencil with which he had already made marks across his note pad.

"That sounds as though they're getting up a tug of war in the corridor," I said. "I wonder how much more the door will stand."

"I don't know what it'll stand," said Shreeve, "but I know what I won't, and that's all this damned row they're making. Like a pack of girls." He stood up.

"You'll only irritate them if you do anything," I said. "We don't want them all in here fooling about with bayonets."

"Irritate them?" He was half-humourously amazed. "Well that's one way of looking at sound discipline. Do you think the Colonel keeps a record of their individual fads and consults it every time he gives an order to form fours?"

"That's rather different."

"It's a difference which made a tenth of the map red."

The Guard had stepped out of the compartment and begun to retire towards his van. Anyway, that ought to show that the partition door is already locked, I thought. I turned to Shreeve: "But seriously I think it would be better not to call attention to ourselves just now."

"Well, if you'd rather not," he said tolerantly, "but I think it's a bad principle. Not because I'm a rabid spit-and-polish man. Only because I foresee that if we don't warn them of our presence now we shall certainly have to later on in the journey. I'm not going to suffer for any volunteer officer's incompetence."

He replaced the sharpener in his pocket, began to draw carefully, his rigid knees resisting the jolts of the now racing train. I thought out what I should do when the English Rifles burst the partition door. Here's the man who thumped on the panel. Here,

I've been cursed with him and his insults against the Army for over an hour. If as long. Probably longer, since we were passing the aerodrome and Camber Woods already. It wouldn't matter how ignominious: Shreeve would never be there to tell them. An airman in furs swung the propellor of a small monoplane. Someone was killing a rabbit with wire in the spinney. Seagulls on arable land far from the sea estuary circled for worms. A dung heap smoked in the damascene steel air. Woods passed like frozen paper. Further on, the girders of a bridge receded obliquely, very close to the window; the train's clatter changed to a lulling profounder rhythm.

"I suppose you've been wondering all this time what I'm up to."

"I have, yes."

"I'm making a rough map of our route, the various landmarks, you know, bridges, signal cabins, the main branch lines, etcetera. Any objects which can fairly be said to have a connection with the railway. It's a small thing I always like to do during a journey. If you were to ask why, I'm not sure whether I should be able to tell you concisely in a few words. I suppose it's because I've always felt impelled to take an interest in whatever happened to be going on round about me at a given moment. And, do you know, the man whom, as I realize more and more every year, I have truly to thank for that little habit is my old headmaster?" His wholehearted smile left no doubt that that gracious portrait had in a very few seconds been discarded in the portfolio for another more striking.

"I wish I had the knowledge to do something of that kind."

"But it's not knowledge you need," he urged keenly. "Anyone could do it. Just take a look at this. Here's our main line—pretty roughly drawn, of course, but that's from memory—here's the central signal cabin at Belstreet Junction, here's where they control the switches leading to the new slipline. Damn."

The tug of war had probably gone to the team nearest to the partition door. A sharp crack from thin wood interrupted Shreeve's voice and I saw that the upper panel had split down the middle. It still screened from us the adjacent section of the corridor. I waited for laughter but heard only the exaggerated cheers of the winning team. Probably none of them had noticed.

"That's as much as I intend to stand."

"Well I don't know. After all, they haven't been kicking up quite so much noise until now. I expect they'll get bored. They'll settle down on their own accord before we've done another few miles."

"All right, here's an agreement we can come to between ourselves," he said definitely. "If there's any further trouble I go and tell them exactly what I think. That settled?"

"And ask them whether they're really there," I evaded.

"Ah, now you're chaffing."

"Well you'll admit that at first you didn't altogether believe me."

"Yes, I admit. But then, not seeing them myself, and arriving as early as I did. . . ."

"Early?"

A slip of the tongue. He flushed. "I told you I was late, I know. I'm afraid that was a bit of a fib. But when I've explained the circumstances I think you'll understand why."

"Of course."

"The truth is I was in the W.C. at the end of the corridor."

"Ah."

"Not actually using it, of course. Not while the train was standing in the station. There's nothing I detest more than that kind of failure to consider the comfort of others."

"Yes."

"You're wondering what I was in there for at all, no doubt. Well, it's not a long story, but it's one which I don't care to repeat often. It might give the impression, quite unjustifiably as it happens, that I was patting my own back."

"I see."

"Well, some years ago I was taking a stroll one half-holiday . . . it was in June I think, as the river had sunk quite three or four feet below its normal level on the banks . . . near Gatley Wiers just outside Mortmere. All of a sudden I heard a splash. A large salmon leaping, I thought. Actually it was a man who had slipped off the foot-bridge and couldn't swim a stroke. I didn't see him till he had passed me by about ten yards. It was going to be a race; the question was, should I overtake him before he reached the wier? I hadn't time to take off anything more than my mackintosh. Well, I got there, just on the edge. It had been devilish hard going, I can tell you, with that icy current against me all the way. I brought him round with artificial respiration. Both of us had our clothes frozen almost stiff on our bodies. I got a passing farmer to loan me his trap and we drove to the nearest cottage. I thought this chap would never stop thanking me for having saved his life. Well, about a year later I met him again. He was still harping on his debt of gratitude, as he called it. I told him I had only done what any man in my place would have been bound to do. We met several times after

that, and every time it was the same story; I had saved his life. What could I say? And when he started going over the whole thing in detail in front of my friends I at last felt I couldn't bear it any longer. Now the point I've been coming to is this: I saw him today at the booking office, fortunately he didn't see me, and I heard him ask for a ticket to Mortmere. Wouldn't you, if you'd been in my place, have made yourself pretty scarce?"

"I suppose I should. All the same I can quite see that he's got every justification for being very grateful."

"Ah, rubbish," said Shreeve, pleased. "Anything to escape a scene on the platform."

"So you don't think there's any chance of running up against him in the train?"

"Oh, he's sure to have gone by the other."

"Now there's a point which has been puzzling me. The other does go to Mortmere?"

"Of course. It's the better train of the two, in fact. Starts twenty minutes later and arrives a quarter of an hour earlier."

"I wish I'd known that before. It would have given me time to get a decent breakfast."

"Well, perhaps you won't regret it."

"Why's that?"

"Those new coaches they've been putting on lately are a bit stuffy."

"That's what was my impression. Only from inspection, of course, and I really know nothing about the technical side of the thing."

His smiling attention had wandered back to the map. He added a few lines, a semi-circle, began shading, did not look up to see whether I was watching. Another train going in the opposite direction to ours passed with a single sound. Watchers on a rapidly curving platform stared like dummies, were swept away by the burnt side of a steep cutting. Massed telegraph wires rose evenly and were flung downwards again at the pole. The river reappeared, passed slowly. The workman driving a tractor could never get on to this train. Nor could any of the married women or chauffeurs living in any of those houses. Metaphysically we were as remote as Saturn or the Plough. Our times differed. Between the dipping of the iron ladle and spilling of the tar on a road dotted with navvies, Shreeve had drawn a line more than a hundred yards long, though it looked only three inches on the paper. Another hour. Cucumber sandwiches. Afterwards the bed among birded wall-paper, feeling very full, sure of dreams.

And in the morning at twelve I should go to the Skull and Trumpet for news and a game of darts.

"Yes, perhaps it's as well we're on this train," Shreeve again smiled. "I suppose you wouldn't remember the account in the newspapers some years ago of an accident which took place in Hainwort tunnel?"

"I don't think so."

"Well, the train that was buried was the Mortmere express. And it started at the very same time as the one you regretted you'd missed will have started today."

"Really. And what do you infer from that?"

"Nothing exactly." He grinned with a mystifier's conscious relish. "But I know that if you'd been travelling then and had gone by the slower train you'd have been saved."

"There are two ifs to that proposition," I readily argued.

"I don't see it."

"All logical assumptions are quibbles."

"Anyway in real life it was the faster train which went wrong. And one of the few survivors, a great friend of mine, gave me a peculiarly interesting account of something he'd noticed about twenty minutes before the disaster."

"Did he?"

"Yes. It was like this. The train was passing certain grounds belonging to the Belmare estate (remind me to point them out to you) and there, not more than twelve yards back from the river, he plainly saw a fisherman dressed in green standing among the rhododendrons and winding his reel. Nothing queer about that. But when he looked again he saw only a horned sheep and two swans."

"Pretty nasty."

"It was, wasn't it? He looked again . . . his attention had been distracted for less than a second, perhaps by some slight movement in the carriage . . . and all he saw was a horned sheep and two swans."

"So what did he do?"

"I never asked."

"Now frankly, did you believe him?"

"I did. And I think you would have done if he'd told you the story himself. It was not the words that convinced me, they might have appeared in any book or play, but his face. That's a thing that never lies."

"If it had convinced me I should not have cared to travel by this line again."

"You would if you'd thought the position out. You see, the warning only applied to the faster train."

"Then it'll be a sinister lookout for your admirer if we spot anything in the shrubs."

He had a brief suspicion: "For whom? Ah, you mean the cove who thought I saved his life. I wonder if he saw me."

"Why?" I frankly asked.

"Because, well, if you'd care to know. . . ." His voice stopped, far ahead of his fumbling experimenting thought. "Because if we were to notice anything in the rhododendrons and the chap you mentioned happened to be one of the survivors, well, I know he's superstitious. . . . I mean he might even attribute his escape merely to having seen me on the platform."

"And follow you about Mortmere telling everyone what a hero you were."

"Ah."

The interesting, superficially obscure explanation he had given me seemed to linger unpleasantly in his mind. A weazel looking out of a stone dyke, scared by footsteps. By footsteps idly drumming on the sweaty tobacco-streaked floor. By Jewsharps and thudded tins. No, again he had not heard. Or perhaps he had, and what he'd said before was all bluff. Leaves were falling outside, from the woods. There were no woods and it was March. Of course, they were birds. Cigar-shaped like brown seagulls. Without wings. One of them struck the pane, softly, flattened out into a brown uneven paste. Ruffled cones of soiled toilet paper blew past. Shreeve was marking a corner of his map very heavily with the pencil. And of all those boys who through the changing years would constantly look up to him, not one dreamed that in the privacy of his room their headmaster was, profoundly and irretrievably, a coward. Ploughed fields were succeeded by grass, a lake, a private golf course. Gentleman's country. Here Disraeli wrote his novels. Breakfast is served from the sideboard. Turf mounds rotted in the damp shadow of the cypress avenue. The head gardener had invented but could not afford to advertise a herbal balm for eczema. It had cured the master and several of his friends. There were iron railings round the trees.

"We're not far from the place now," Shreeve said.

"And is this part of the estate?"

"It is. Though we've some way to go yet before we reach the river. What's that?"

"Only those Territorials." My tone excused him from remembering.

"You know what we agreed."

"Yes, I do," I risked.

"You'd think it wise to warm them now?"

"Probably." I became confident.

"I mean you don't feel they might calm down on their own accord after a time?"

"Not now." I definitely cornered him.

"Very well."

I was quite wrong; he had hesitated merely out of consideration for my own opinion. Christ. I had sprung on to the seat, fumbled for the handle of a golf club, futilely released it. Now that the moment had finally come, Shreeve was at the partition door, his hands curved to a megaphone. He shouted in padre's affected slang: "Here, cheese that row you fellows."

"Bligging spak a flinka blacking spug!" A few laughed. The lower panel split noisily. "All together, ram the fliggering backer to bitching hell." But already some other interest deflected them. "Chuck over and hand me back me Tin Lizzy. Look at this you gowks, Sandy's gone and cut his bum. That's his own funeral for shoving it through a closed window. Bleeding like a pig, is he? Here, take my neb-wipe." Slowly they subsided, their voices merging in the clatter of the train. Probably we were safe.

"That's settled 'em."

"Jolly fine the way you did it."

"Oh, well, not really. I'm pretty used to having to deal with all kinds of ragging. Boys and soldiers, they're really just one big family. Of course I don't often address my boys in that particular tone." He smiled finely. "It was a bit of a joke. Anyway, how can it matter so long as they don't see me?"

It was true that they seemed to have quietened down. Too much so, I thought. But perhaps Shreeve was partly right about their being like boys. During the journey they might go through at least five successive crazes. They wouldn't persist in any of them for long. Perhaps they had now returned to the booby-trap. Well, at best all they could do would be to squirt water at us through the crack in the panel. But then I could move my seat to the other side.

"Hi."

"What is it?"

"Look."

"A river. Ah, you mean we're somewhere near?"

"We are. It's just beyond that first clump of pines. Ever seen a lawn kept quite like that? Think of the generations of gardeners who must have been born and died before they made

it what it is now. Be ready to look along my arm when I point. A panther might come out of those trees in the height of the afternoon and you wouldn't hear even so slight a sound as an ant might make on lichen. Till it had sprung at your deck-chair. If ever in any age men have seen ghosts, I do earnestly believe that it is here, in gardens such as this, frosty, at full noon, that they have seen them. Not in the moonlit chancel or the abandoned graveyard."

"Got the salts ready?" I partly sneered.

"Mind you," he seriously, theatrically commented; "I'm not guaranteeing you'll see anything. And if by any wild chance you do, it will be something so indefinable that afterwards you won't be sure that you haven't imagined it. The ghoul on the corkscrew stairs and the corpse in the frozen reservoir don't cut much ice in these critical days. No, it would be very different from that. Something, a stiff hedge or perhaps a tree which some fancy-gardener has been busy on, would deceive the eye. Or let's say that some pattern in the landscape would strike a sympathetic chord in your brain. You know how in large cathedrals sometimes a certain note from the organ has sympathetically affected the roof, and suddenly a chandelier weighing many tons has plunged into the crowded nave. Perhaps it would be like that. A certain vibration of light. Do you notice anything to the right of those bushes?"

"No."

"Very well. What's *that*?"

"I don't see."

"Quick, man. **THERE.**"

"Where? Mind out, you'll drop your handkerchief."

"Oh, to hell with that."

Straining from the opened window he violently, erratically pointed, his stiff arm shaken in the racing outer air, his fingers clutching a mere corner of what seemed less like a silk handkerchief than a small green flag.

"Didn't you see anything?" he absently hoped.

"No. Not where you were pointing."

"What's up?" He suspected suddenly, with a forced explosive laugh: "You're looking as pale as a horse. You didn't think I was serious, did you?"

"I really couldn't say."

"Catch a glimpse of the fisher, eh?"

"I'm afraid not. But I saw someone I happened to recognize."

"Well, considering the pace we were going I should think you were quite probably mistaken."

"Why?" I flashed: "Do you know who it was?"

"Of course not. I mean, how can I guess when I don't even know who you *thought* it was?"

"Harold Wrygrave. I saw him in a car. Standing up."

"You're wrong," he said with noticeable readiness, "Wrygrave always takes the Upper Fourth in French at this hour on Wednesdays."

"Well, he must have mislaid his timetable this morning. I know I'm right because I distinctly noticed that he'd recognized you as we passed. And I rather fancy that he was standing at the salute."

"I'm afraid it would take more than that to convince me," Shreeve said with faint irritation. "Of course, if you're really quite *sure* that you recognized him, well, it is just possible. He's rather a harebrained sort of cove. And there's just the chance that knowing I'm temporarily out of the way he might have risked taking a short holiday. Even the salute which you say you noticed mightn't have been altogether imaginary. You know the truth is, unaccountable though it may seem, that that fellow thinks absolutely no end of me."

"Does he?"

"Yes. Mind you, I don't want to boast. It isn't because of any striking virtue he may have detected in me. If anything it's what might almost have been called a weakness on my part that he admires. On a certain occasion. I wonder if you can guess what I mean?"

"I believe I do. There were rumors at the time, you know."

"Ah, then I shan't feel I'm giving the fellow away. What happened was that I surprised him in the act. I suppose he thought that no one would visit the dormitories during the afternoon. Perhaps I ought to have brought the matter into the courts. But then, though I'd be the very first to condemn that particular offence, when I considered that it would be generally known that one of my own masters . . . well, I think any man in my shoes would have hesitated."

"Certainly." I wondered what far more interesting subliminal train of thought had allowed him to expose so mechanically to me an incident which officially he would have been the first to deny.

"I look at it like this. Either you take action publicly and ruin the fellow for life, or else you deal with him on the spot in your own way, and instead of making a dangerous enemy you'll have a, if one can use that word, friend who'd do anything in the

world. . . ." He broke off with sudden, almost fanatical inspiration: "Perhaps you *imagined* you'd seen him."

"I thought I'd told you pretty clearly that I was certain of it."

"Ah, you don't understand. I mean perhaps what you saw was not Wrygrave at all but a shape, a simulacrum with his form and features."

"A different kind of fisher in green," I supposed.

"Yes. Yes. That's it. An omen, a warning in the quiet of the day, a visible prefiguration it may be of death as we comfortably roll through the frozen countryside."

"Well, it's true I thought he looked ill."

"Pale, was he?" Shreeve subtly foreknew the symptoms: "Looked as though he'd had a shock? As though he'd seen an apparition himself? I quite understand. That's my friend's impression all over again. But let me tell you this; both that shock and that pallor were not his but yours, transferred from you to him, to it, to the *thing* which some premonition in your brain had conjured among the rhododendrons."

"Conjured, ah ha."

"Well, if you think I'm yarning there's nothing more to be said. For the present. Perhaps you're right, perhaps I am. Let's hope I'm wrong. But we shall know quite soon I think, as unless I've totally misread the timetables for the last six years the other train should overtake us in a very few minutes, and then it'll have less than twenty miles to go before it arrives in the vicinity of Hainwort tunnel."

"Why 'in the vicinity'?"

"You don't suppose it's actually going into the tunnel do you?"

"I'm sure I've no idea."

"Haven't you? Well, that's the richest I've heard for many years. No idea whether it's going into Hainwort tunnel. Lord, man, if it went into that not only would it never come out but every passenger on board would be killed as surely as though the train had fallen five thousand feet into a ravine. Every man. Not one would escape. Not a single one. You see, it was the extraordinary collapse of that tunnel, on the first day of its use, which caused the original disaster. It has never been repaired. In fact, the slipline leading to it has only once been used."

"Well I hope it won't be used today," I sneered.

"Ah, God forbid. Let us try to believe that Wrygrave himself may really have played the truant this morning after all. It's best not even to imagine the horrible death which for the second

time in the history of that train hundreds of persons would suffer owing to the incompetent engineering, or as some are inclined to think, the criminal guilt of one man."

"But how can you assume, even supposing there's the least detail of truth in your so-called omen, that it will be that train and no other which will crash?"

He ignored my irritation: "Oh, *we're* safe enough, if that's what you mean. And I think if you look at my map for a moment you'll see why." He offered me the pad, adding: "No one to interrupt our meditations this time."

"Yes, it's extraordinary how quiet they've been since you warned them."

"Oh, they know well enough whether you mean business or not. Now, where was I? Belstreet Junction? Follow my finger along this line. There it is. What I want you particularly to notice is that before we reach the Junction and for some three miles after we have left it the track consists of four parallel sets of rails. You may not know why that is. I'll tell you. These two lower lines, an up line and a down, are used exclusively for express traffic, but the other two, the ones nearest the top of the page, are for freight trains and slower passenger traffic only. Now, we are at present travelling along one of the slow lines. And the reason why we are doing this is that in a very few minutes we are going to be overtaken by the Mortmere express, the train to which my friend's delusion, if you like to put it that way, referred. Look along the page a little farther to the right. What do you notice now? *That the four parallel sets of rails have become two.* You can understand that it would be impossible for any train to overtake another here. Therefore by the time we have reached the switches uniting the slow with the fast line the other train will have had to have passed us already. Follow my finger. Now we have reached the spot where the disused slipline branches off from the main track. I want you to tell me: Which train do you think will arrive here first?"

"The other, I suppose."

"Quite right. The other. And, God permitting, it will be the first to draw up in Hainwort Halt, the first to deliver its passengers to the care of the Mortmere busman. How simple, how ordinary that sounds as I say it. And yet this slipline, so easily rubbed out on paper, might be the indirect cause of death to all those people."

"Why should it?"

"There you are," he shrugged, "why? Why did the tunnel collapse in two places almost simultaneously ten years ago? A

minute error in trigonometry. Some urchin comes during the lunch hour and fools about with the surveyor's instruments, and afterwards nobody notices that one arm of the theodolite is bent a mere division of a centimetre out of the straight. You could pretend to accept that explanation, like the coroner. But if you'd stood as I have done for many hours among those terrible ruins it might have occurred to you to wonder whether after all it was an accident, an error, that the distance between the two collapsed sections of the tunnel almost exactly corresponded to the average length of an express train." His spittle inspissated to a jellied cord clung between his softly gabbling lips, his hot face neared me, absurdly, disproportionately excited: "No, my friend, there is only one explanation which will fit that fact. Deliberate foul-play."

"And I suppose you've got a pretty close idea who did it."

I had gone too far. For a moment his voice was suspicious: "No, I can't say I have, myself."

"Of course not. How absurd of me. As though anyone could possibly know; when even the coroner had to accept the other explanation."

"Well, as a matter of fact there is someone who does know. Or says he does. A great friend of mine, the same chap, as it happens, who saw the fisher and was one of the very few survivors. I'll give you his words: 'As surely as Wrygrave's vice is branded on his face, that maniacal crime is stamped on the face of the fiend who did it.' He declined to say anything further at the time, but from various hints he had let drop I got the impression, perhaps wrongly, that he was referring to the designer of the tunnel, the man who is at present architect to the Mortmere Rural Council."

"Wherry?"

"You know him, do you?"

"Quite well."

"Oh, I can guess what you think." Shreeve was on his feet and had begun to pace the compartment: "That he's one of the most amiable and casual of men, the last fellow in the world to have carefully planned out even a comparatively innocent practical joke. I thought so too. But when my friend, though it's true he had not actually mentioned Wherry by name, began to tell me a few things about the man's record, how at school he had been known as a liar and a cheat and in later life had even been implicated in a scandal connected with the cricket-club funds, I almost wondered whether perhaps I hadn't been mistaken, whether after all this same man mightn't have had some presentiment

of the Hainwort disaster." It was plain from Shreeve's sweating face and the vicious jerking of his clenched hands that whatever crime of Wherry's he had in mind it was not one which had been committed some ten years before. He seemed to suspect my thought, for he soon added:

"The switches leading to the disused slipline are hidden from the view of the nearest signalman by a bend in the mainline cutting. A child could tamper with them. Now suppose that the man who was at least partly responsible for the first accident is still living today and that his name might be Wherry. Suppose that there are several persons on the other train who are travelling to Mortmere in order to take part in a certain Treasure Hunt and that the treasure is known to be of considerable value. Mightn't he think it expedient to delay them?"

"It would be rather short-sighted considering he'd be on the doomed train himself."

Shreeve was perceptibly checked: "Yes, that's true." He frowned, withdrew into his fanatic's incomprehensible daydream, suddenly resumed: "That's true. You saw him, I know. But what if by some amazing coincidence something did happen to that train while he was on it. Nothing serious, of course. Just something that would make him believe for an instant that at last he had been called upon to give account for the part he may have played in the wrecking of that very same train, ten years ago. I am not a vindictive man, I shouldn't like to hear that he had lain for hours slowly bleeding to death in the suffocating darkness of the tunnel which he himself had designed. But somehow if he were to receive a severe shock or even to break an ankle I couldn't sincerely feel that the retribution had altogether been unjust."

He mused, shaking with restraint, semiconsciously fumbled for his watch, regarded its face for some seconds evidently without reading the time. I noticed that we were passing through a large station.

"That train's overdue by two minutes," he at last said, sharply.

A faint shattering of glass surprised us. The electric-light bulb above our heads had burst and fallen into the bowl-shaped glass shade which subtended it. A slurred thud sounded from the next compartment.

"Sympathetic vibration. Perhaps they're tossing one of their comrades in a blanket and he's hit the ceiling."

"Well, I've had enough of it," Shreeve said.

"But that's the first sound we've heard from them for over half an hour."

"It's the last we'll hear for the rest of the journey."

I had followed him into the corridor, ready to move towards the guard's-van. He rapped briskly on the upper panel of the partition.

"Unless I have complete silence for the next twenty minutes the whole lot of you will spend the week-end in the guard-room."

There was no response. From a more distant section of the train the thudding sounded again. Like careful heavy footsteps. Shreeve was peering through a crack in the panel.

"There's no one there. They must all have gone up to the front part of the train."

"I don't see how they could. It would be far too crowded already."

"All right, then they've all fallen through the windows if you like. It wouldn't be so very surprising; considering the lackadaisical bolshevik they've got for one of their officers."

The problem did not occupy him for long. Outside three sets of rails raced backwards along the cindered surface of a high but gradually descending embankment. He tapped the glass of his watch, frowned. We had returned to the compartment.

"I shall positively have to get this old turnip of mine overhauled."

"Really?"

"It's gained quite five minutes since I put it right by the station clock."

"Awful curse when the things begin to go wrong. Once a watchmaker gets his fingers into them they're done for, in my opinion."

"Ten minutes, more like. You see, we've got some way to go yet before we reach Belstreet Junction."

"I thought we'd passed it already."

"Did you?"

"Well, we've just passed through some large station."

"You're quite wrong. Because if we had the express would have overtaken us by now."

"Anyway you know the line better than I do. Look out of the window and judge for yourself."

"Of course, I can quite understand what gave you the impression," he maintained. "We were passing through a wood. I noticed myself that the carriage had become darker for a moment."

"I daresay. All the same I saw the platform with my own eyes."

"Damned rubbish," he almost shouted. His direct obstinate regard unapparently focussed some object moving outside the window, became suddenly attentive: "Good God."

"Well, am I right?"

He was stiff with nervous terror: "Good God. We're done for."

"What on earth do you mean?"

"He may have time to pull up yet. A quarter of a mile. Listen. The brakes. Thank Christ. Don't you think you can hear them?"

"I think that if you indulge in much more of this bloody nonsense you'll make yourself mentally ill."

"Oh my God, too late."

"What for?"

"Christ forgive me."

A self-balancing toy bird. He rocked woodenly, lightly on the seat. I turned to my window, less with ostentatious disgust than with irritation that his nervousness had genuinely infected me. Through the interior shadow of a passing signal cabin I thought I'd imagined I'd seen a man swinging an unlit danger lamp. The fields rose slowly to the level of the embankment. Cows moved against a large rock, across grass lozenged with flat stones. A cutting interposed, shallow-sided deepening, slagged with frosted pebbles. The train suddenly swerved. We must have branched off from the main line. What an idiot, I almost thought we had. But of course it must have been some sideline that branched off from us. I did not look at Shreeve, unwilling to let him know how much I had been scared. In these parts they allowed weeds to grow between the sleepers. Reeds. They flickered against the pane. Oh my God. Where are we? Try not to be quite such a fool. You see, rector, I really couldn't for the moment remember that I'd ever heard that there were mountains. I can tell you I almost swore I'd attend Matins for six years. What makes the rocks look so white? Struth I'm sweating. Yes, and of course those blackbirds are really condors. How extraordinarily white. Rock above rock. When you get out of this you'll wonder how on earth you ever let that bloody imbecile half-convince you that something might happen. All the same, looking at it quite disinterestedly, you'll admit that the height of this cutting must be a record. For anywhere in Europe.

"This was my work. In a moment of jealousy temptation overcame me. Now I must pay the price." Withdrawn into a

trance of fear he had begun mechanically to confess. His pudding-cloth face wilted. A pool increased round his feet.

He would not see me at the window. I had rammed down the sash, leant out. Like a canyon the cutting deepened among organ-pipe rocks towards the still distant mouth of a tunnel. The English Rifles were walking on the carriage roofs. Some had already reached the engine. Exceeding sixty miles an hour it visibly left the rails, jogging the foremost coaches through spraying wood from ploughed sleepers, mowing the reeds. A blinding jolt had us into the inverted rack, dazzled with glass showering like luminous fish, ricochetting between punching upholstery. Jump. The brakes savaged the wheels. Calvary. Mater. The roses. Vesperal. Burial at sea. Slowing down. Shreeve stood at the uncertain door. He jumped like a rat. Had jumped, falling softly, not stunned, not even bleeding, my spine uninjured, my eyes safe. Buried in reeds.

Shreeve called, close by. On my knees I peered, saw the train entering the tunnel. Slowly. It had almost pulled up.

"Quick. Out of this."

An iron echo approached us. Clambering the lower rocks I turned. The express had taken the switch. Booster-fitted, excessively rolling, the racing Mogul engine rounded the curve, bounded into the rear of the carriage we had left. Coaches mounted like viciously copulating bulls, telescoped like ventilator hatches. Nostril gaps in a tunnel clogged with wreckage instantly flamed. A faint jet of blood sprayed from a vacant window. Frog-sprawling bodies fumed in blazing reeds. The architrave of the tunnel crested with daffodils fell compact as hinged scenery. Tall rag-feathered birds with corrugated red wattles limped from holes among the rocks.

"Another thirty seconds in that carriage and we should have been . . . well. It makes you think. And I'm afraid poor Wherry will never see Mortmere again." Shreeve gravely turned, designated the externally undamaged cast-steel coaches of the other train. Now hedged by flames. I noticed that the out-of-date sedan carriage which in the station I had seen at the rear of the train was no longer there.

"I am truly sorry," Shreeve added. "He was one of the best-hearted fellows I have known. You mustn't take too seriously the things I may have said under the stress of excitement before the accident. He was a white man all through. And there's another thing I believe I said which might have misled you. Didn't I at one time make some remark rather to the effect, 'This is all my own doing'?"

"You did."

"Well, I can explain to you *now* what I meant. The fact is you must have been right after all in supposing you saw Wrygrave in a car. At first I was rather inclined to fancy you had been pulling the long bow. But from the moment when the train took the switch the whole truth flashed on me. This was his revenge. He had waited to make sure that I was on the train, then raced us to the slipline. Because two years before I had just thrashed him after making my discovery in the dormitories. That's what I meant when I said it was my doing. If I had neglected my duty this awful disaster would not have occurred."

"Wrygrave's no more capable of a calculated revenge than a hen. It's malicious bunk. Though I admit I couldn't answer for what he might do under the influence of blackmail. You suggest that he bore you a grudge for thrashing him; but how could he foresee that contrary to all schedules the slower train would reach the switch before the other did today? No," I emotionally accused, "if he intended to wreck any train at all it was not ours he had in mind."

Shreeve made no defence. Above us a voice suddenly shouted: "Here they are."

"Lord forgive me."

"SHREEVE. HEARN."

"You fool, it's Welken."

"God. That you, rector?"

"Yours ever. Either of you hurt? Eh? Well, take it easy, old boy. No hurry. Got the car here waiting for you. We'll have you home in a jiffy, and then you can tell us all about it."

The arum colocasia, lupines, lentils, the pomegranate, sycamore, date palms, yew, beech and privet, fenugreek, the melouk-hia, the Acacia Farnesiana, carob tree, mimosa habbas, lemon verbena, nasturtium, rose and lily. Snakes hung from the elm branches; pigeons rose from black curtains of leaves, startled by the engine of the car. The river coiled through the woods, avoiding boles of pine and willow. Across the waters of the sun-white marshes alligator fishermen punted their raft. The seaman's monument of Belstreet Down like the gnomon of a sundial cast its shadow over the roofs of the village. A quarter to five. Blue-tiled houses which had grown like bushes out of the ground.

"Well?"

"Try squinting under the damp beehive in the summer-house."

"Hoch, of course! Can't think how I forgot."

Welken had maneuvered Shreeve into a seat beside the chauffeur and was sitting with me in the rear. Descending rooks perched on the lowered hood. At the horse-trough outside the Skull and Trumpet, Alison Kemp balancing yoked milk pails returned the rector's amiable wave. Ducks slept on the toad-green water of the pond. Nothing has been moved. A fringe of chopped straw moustached the louvre slits in the church tower. Sergeant Claptree wore a joiner's green baize apron, was retenoning the struts of his hen-house. Facetiously he sprayed the chauffeur with disinfectant from a brass syringe. Ernie Travers opened the rectory gates.

"Are they waiting for me, my lad?"

"Yes, sir. Oh thank you, sir."

Up the bleached gravel drive, oppressed by ink-dark trees. Lilac bifurcated past the windscreen in perfumes of wan blue gauze. Odours of chimes, of croquet hoops, tango of views of choirboys through the rustling privet. A lawn-mower wove its rainbow fountain among imagined rock and fern. Shreeve had fainted. The front door was held open by the brasshead of a fox. Summer mildly billowed into a hall shadowy as a cave where Welken's geographical globes faded beneath clusters of hats. A rubber ball struck one of the windows.

"So Wherry's safe after all," I said.

Shreeve's drugged face was instantly alert. Round the screen of privet Tod Erswell and Boy Radnor swerved, Wherry overtaking them.

"Sloshed you both by inches. Now let's see if you can *run*."

"Hullo George."

"Gustave by God," but he easily deflected whatever amazement he may have felt into: "Hullo Hearn. No idea we'd have the pleasure of seeing you after all these years."

"The two rivals," Welken shrewdly winked. "Who's it to be this year? Gustave looks the more determined, but George managed to arrive earlier and I'll bet you he's been out with his foot-rule surveying the ground."

"Pardon me. Just a moment." Shreeve turned and hurried from us towards the garden.

"Watch him, George, ha ha. Stealing a march, eh? But perhaps you've got the Treasure in your pocket already, have you George?"

"Didn't I see you on the fast train today?"

"Daresay you did. That's the one I came by. Slipped a coach at Belstreet Junction. It's far quicker than going on to Hainwort Halt."

"Quicker than you may have thought. There was an accident."

"Whew. Anyone injured?"

"Come on boys. Time we started the Hunt. I'm off."

"Ta-ta rector. We'll be with you in two shakes. How many?"

"All your Territorials."

"Poor beggars. They were looking forward to the holiday camp in Hainwort marshes."

"Lucky you'd decided not to travel with them." I couldn't repress a certain admiration in my tone.

"You're right. A word in your ear: I had a premonition."

"I'll wager you did."

The trellised verandah supports. The lemon verbena like a tropic creeper. Wherry's Provençal hat and pirate's sash. How quiet and how hot the air is. You might drop a bomb into the sea and it would leave a more permanent sign than the shouts and chatter of the crowd on the lawn will leave. Welken mounted a wicker armchair:

"Before we begin I have a most interesting announcement to make. News has lately reached me of an engagement between Miss Belmare and Mr. Reynard Moxon. They are to be married in July."

Bellowing cheers. Centripetal faces turned. Miss Belmare with Dr. Mears following curtly pushed her way to the front. He brought a tape-measure out of his waistcoat-pocket; ceremonially encircled her bust.

"Forty-five inches."

"Hooray."

Among the crowd Shreeve noticeably showed another immediate interest. In profile his chattering face aided by descriptive arm-gestures futilely strained to intercept Anthony Belmare's view of the ceremony. An interpreter. Grudging the boy's independent impression he was evidently explaining the scene. Anthony absently responded. An absorbed reader evading a wasp.

"Our only regret is that Mr. Moxon has been unexpectedly detained at Karlsbad by the customs officials."

Bombs of laughter.

"Otherwise I think you'll all concede there would have been little doubt, to use a pet expression of my old Dean's at St. Sal-

vadors, as to who would have been the successful *agonist* in to-day's contest."

Serious cheers.

"I will now make the customary resumé of the rules. Ladies, gentlemen and boys, one of your number has been preinformed of the whereabouts of the Treasure. When or if unobserved he will seek, unearth and clandestinely pocket it. (No, Sir Napier, 'Unearth' is *not* an accidental hint.) The rest of you will have exactly half an hour in which to spot the concealer. The spotter wins the Treasure. If there is no spotter the concealer has it for keeps. I declare the prime of the hunt. You are advised to draw the kitchen garden."

Wrecking shouts. They faded into the trees. The crowd separated into groups, solos. Miss Frorster in hygienic sandals and a hand-woven skirt. Sir Napier Bevan blue-lipped in the heat, gaitered and spurred, with checked breeches. Caesar Wrygrave sweating under the eyes, oyster-faced, deliberately observant. The boys from Frisbald College. Charles Wrythe. Andy and Mundy Shanks with a privately-made chart of the grounds. Gaspard Farfox with a terrier. The girls from Miss Frorster's Modern Academy. Mr. Hards, scales of graveyard mud on his corduroy knees. Hynd and Starn, wearing faded college rucker caps. Wherry last but two, seriously conversing with the three choirboys. Ernie Travers, Boy Radnor, Tod Erswell in knickers. All descended the steps through the yew tunnel into the hedged kitchen garden. Only Anthony Belmare, still followed by Shreeve, remained on the lawn. Curtained by verbena on the shadowy verandah Welken said:

"I believe that boy's spotted you. But he can't get at you without being seen by Shreeve."

"What," I mused.

"Great Scott, I believe I forgot to tell you. You're the concealer. Hope you won't mind."

"No. What do I do?"

"Simple as winking. Just walk into the summerhouse round the corner when no one's looking and lift the beehive. Pocket the treasure. Then mix with the crowd. There are no bees, I may say."

"But someone is looking."

"Never mind. The boy won't do anything while Shreeve is with him. Really it's hardly fair. I know what, I'll go and have a talk with Shreeve and give Anthony a chance to get away. Then if you're quick you can slip into the summerhouse without being noticed."

"All right."

Carefully parting the hanging verbena, Welken stepped out on to the lawn, approached Shreeve:

"Well, Gustave, got any ideas?"

"No."

"I should try the kitchen garden. That's where the rest of them have gone. The concealer will probably be there."

"Will he?"

"Ah, that's asking."

Welken laid an emphatic forefinger on the lapel of Shreeve's coat. Anthony had already left them, begun to descend the steps through the yew tunnel. Shreeve's back was towards the verandah. The cowl on the blue cone-roof of the summerhouse veered as the damper air from the interior rose towards the sun. At the cool entrance brambles obstinate as wire had eaten into the doorless jambs. The beehive stood on a single-legged table spoked with warped cricket stumps. Whorled coils of black horsehair or blood sausage. It broke in my hands like cake, issuing dark treacle. Fortunately there were mulberry leaves. I cleaned the ivory paper-cutter, concealed it in my shirt.

"Here he comes, boys." Wherry's voice. At the back. A square in the trellis window was unblocked by leaves. Wherry with the three choirboys waiting in a clearing among the laurels. Bushes arranged like pincers having their axis at the summerhouse and a narrow gap between the far ends where Anthony Belmare carefully appeared.

Unnoticed, Wherry quickly hid.

"Challenge," Ernie Travers shouted.

"Sucks, you're wrong," Anthony said. "Same to you."

"Are we?" Boy Radnor ignored the returned challenge with a seriously spiteful sneer. "How do we know you aren't lying?"

"How do I know you aren't?"

"Never said anything. What's more we've had enough of your cheek."

"At him, dogs."

"Go and eat worms." Anthony briefly put out his tongue, began to run.

Ernie Travers smartly tripped him at the gap, had him by the ankle. Tod Erswell took the other leg. Boy Radnor's wanted hands clipped beneath his armpits violently raised him. Anthony struggled with mock anger, the sleeves of his blazer slipping to his elbows, the thin watch-strap breaking on his wrist.

"You'll find some string in my pocket," he offered.

"Booh. We could fix you up with cotton."

"You're going to be jolly well searched."

Boy Radnor wrenched open Anthony's blazer, fumbled for the buttons of his silk tennis shirt.

"I don't know what you think you're doing."

"Stop his gab, Ernie. The sash will do."

"Dashed clever, aren't you. Three to one."

"You beastly rotters."

Lost in pleasure, Wherry had frankly come out from the bushes.

"Look out, there's someone running."

Wherry had no time to disappear. Branches snapped from the bushes at the gap, Shreeve plunged in like an escaped pony. Already before he had rounded the corner his arm had been raised to point; now it fixed on Wherry: "You bestial fiend. I'll make you pay for it."

"Buzz off."

"They shall know about this."

"Admit you've been properly fooled."

"Rector. Here."

A party of treasure-hunters whom Shreeve had easily outraced had now arrived at the gap. Charles Wrythe led them, sweating in drab herring bone reach-me-downs, all out for the treasure, limping in tough boots through the hot grass. Miss Belmare followed, strong-buttocked, planting her heelless shoes heavily. Welken with a preconceived explanation of the scene scarcely observed it, was twisted with laughter:

"Blowed if they haven't almost torn the clothes off the boy's back. And the scream of it all is that you're both quite wrong."

"The man who designed Hainwort tunnel. . ." Shreeve sinisterly began.

"Whooha ha ha whoohaha ha."

"Wouldn't go far out of his way for a treasure you could put in your pocket."

"Whooha ha. Now Gustave, don't take it to heart. You're both in the same boat. And you've a clear twenty minutes to make it right or, whoohaha, wrong if we look at it from George's point of view. Try again."

"Not until I've made an important statement."

"If it comes to statements," Wherry said, "I believe I could make one about the headmaster of Frisbald College which would put daylight through several none too recent events."

"What about a duel?" A voice asked.

"Whoo ha. Come now, shake hands like the pals we all know you really are On with the Hunt. Time's precious."

"What about it?" Miss Belmare persisted. "With pea pistols. Reynard gave me a couple when we were engaged; he used to use them when he was a boy."

Miss Frorster faintly sobbed.

"By great luck I have them with me," Miss Belmare surprisingly drew two small revolvers from the V slit in her blouse, handed one to Shreeve.

"Gentleman to see you, sir." Whinny Saunders the rectory maid standing at the gap addressed Welken.

"Tell him I . . . Who is it?"

"Sergeant Ganghorn, sir. Motored up from the police station."

"Very well. Awfully sorry, you people. Shan't be long."

"May the worse man lose."

He had gone. Miss Belmare handed Wherry the other revolver. Above the bushes I thought I saw the roof of a black motor van. Drawn up under the elms, on the drive.

"Is that a pea-shooter?" Charles Wrythe seriously asked.

Miss Belmare scoffed: "It's a sweat syringe."

"More like a six-shooter." Sir Napier Bevan had come critically forward. "If you value the judgment of an old sportsman, you'll both put them away where they came from."

Miss Belmare blushed. Wherry:

"By God, I believe you're right. WAIT."

SPAK. Shreeve had opportunely fired. Dropped the revolver with theatrical horror. Started forward. Mumbled: "Awful mistake." Dr. Mears intercepted him:

"My job this time."

Wherry writhed sneering like a rat on the ground with a bullet through his groin. Far off, from the sea, a first phrase of thunder warned. The crowd stood posed in self-conscious inactivity, aware of the tableau they formed. The laurels signalled in a fainted damp breeze. Bees whirred. Beyond Belstreet Down the marine sky glittering like tin seemed the cymbals on which the vibrating note of a steamer's siren had been sharply struck. Dr. Mears prised open a nickel instrument case. Everyone was chatting. At the gap, Welken had excitedly reappeared.

His face changed with difficulty: "What's the verdict, doctor?"

"Not fatal I think, unless gangrene supervenes. Though I fear he will be permanently lamed."

"That's a pity."

"I can't imagine how Reynard made the mistake," Miss Belmare said.

"A most amazing thing."

Taut with news Welken finally released: "Then what do you say to this: Harold Wrygrave has been arrested on a charge of train wrecking."

THE SITUATION OF THE AMERICAN WRITER

Stephen Spender

DURING EIGHTEEN MONTHS which I spent in the United States until November 1948, I used often to ask myself how the life of an American writer compared with that of an English one. The answers which I offer in this essay are not based on careful documentation or research. It is possible that I may be wrong on some points. Nevertheless they are answers given by someone deeply interested, for his own reasons, in the question, and as such, they have a certain conviction. Their interest lies a good deal in the fact of an English writer making them: they are probably—some of them—the last which would occur to an American. But this interest is authentic because it relates to an international situation, the relationship of British and American attitudes. I am not attempting to state 'The truth about the American literary life'; but 'How an English writer sees the situation of his American colleagues.'

A certain frustration accompanies attempts of British to write about Americans and of Americans to write about British. This is in itself a significant fact of the Anglo-American situation. We are each of us hyper-sensitive about our nation in relation to this particular other one. Therefore many things which a Britisher could say about Britain would cause annoyance if said by an American, and vice versa. It seems then, important to say at the outset that I am not hostile to America. In fact, I love America in the only way which to me seems real to love a country. That is to say, I regard America as a country where opposition to bad institutions, commercialization, exploitation, vulgarity, and many other obvious evils, is, after all, real within the American continent and the American system. It is possible to be an American and oppose the bad things which are American, and there is

nourishment in the climate and the institutions of America for such opposition. To say this is to say very decisively that one loves America, for it is to say that there is an America to support against the badness of America, even within America as we know it today. It is salutary to remember that there are few countries in the contemporary world to which one can pay such a compliment.

The greatness of American literature is that it derives from this living opposition of another America which is very living within the American system. One need only mention the names of the best American writers—Hemingway, Faulkner, Tate, Wilson, Robert Lowell, E. E. Cummings, Marianne Moore, Penn Warren, Blackmur, Matthiessen, Trilling, Thurber, Jean Stafford, Mary McCarthy, Eudora Welty—to take the most random choice—in order to show that the sum of contemporary American literature is a living body of protest against the vulgarity, commercialization, advertising, exploiting, which many people think of as the most characteristic American qualities. In fact, contemporary American literature suggests what the last American election suggested: that there is an America realer and more alive than the America which pollsters, advertisers, Hollywood and news editors know about.

The most striking difference between the European and the American writer is that the American does not belong to a community of literature. It is not until one has been in America for some time that one realizes the extent to which in Europe he does. In France, to be a young writer is to seek entry into a community. The symbol of this community is the Parisian café where the students and young writers meet to discuss their literary problems, admire each other's work and decide that their 'movement' is the last revolution of the word to succeed all previous literary régimes. The literary review is, like the café, a meeting place, which is also a battleground, of generations. If the older writers do not appear in the reviews, they are easily forgotten. To be a living writer is to be part of the living, discussing community of French letters.

In England, contemporary literature is not such a conscious community as in France. However, to a great extent, Oxford and Cambridge provide a literary tradition which widens later into Bloomsbury, the Twenties, the Thirties, the New Romantics, into which the life of writers who have not been educated at those universities merges, albeit sometimes rebelliously. Even a writer like D. H. Lawrence became, by way of the literary meetings with other writers at Lady Ottoline Morrell's house at Garsington, an

Oxford rebel, belonging far more to this tradition than to the Nottingham coal-mines. The outstanding English literary periodicals are meeting places of generations. The anthologies of poets show often a sense of the poets of a young generation communicating with each other to an extent which can make the reader feel an intruder. The older writers are nearly all acquainted with each other personally. Apart from the tendency of older and more successful English writers to petrify into public monuments during their lifetime, a general consciousness of shared values which can be maintained or betrayed, informs English literary life.

The young American writer is in an entirely different situation from the young French writer going to the café, the young English writer at Oxford or Cambridge or at some intellectual suburb of these. There is no café in which he will meet Hemingway, Dos Passos, Faulkner. There is no periodical in which his name will be 'accepted' among the great reputations of older writers who are known throughout the world.

If he happens to meet older writers, he will be meeting them across, as it were, an enormous gulf of grandiose success, Hollywood success, Life Magazine success, which raises writers socially out of the sphere of literature and into that of film stars or successful journalists. Or perhaps he meets them across a gulf of bitter failure within which the older writer is isolated, embittered and fortified.

The Pathology of Literary Success would make an interesting study. Its dangers are twofold: first, that it may separate the writer physically and spiritually from his most fertile material of felt experience, which may well be associated with his childhood and early strivings. Secondly, success may mean the enthusiasm of an audience who appreciate qualities which have little connexion with literature. In America, there is the third danger, that the writer's economic position rests almost entirely on by-products of his purely literary productivity, films, articles in highly paying magazines, even exploitation of his name by advertisers (recently an advertisement has appeared, in the form of a high-minded sentiment about world peace written in the handwriting, with a Parker Pen, of Mr. Ernest Hemingway). Above all, the danger is that the publicized personality of the writer, with his four wives, his big-game-hunting, his knocking-down-of-other-writers-at-parties, tends to eclipse his ever more modest activities in his study. Nor does this machinery by which the loaded ore of writing is transformed into expensive-seeming glossy by-products of reputation (just as the by-products of coal-tar are turned into miscellaneous articles such as aspirin tablets,

artificial silk, and film for cameras) delay until the writer has attained middle age. One has only to follow the whizzing comets of Mr. Truman Capote and Mr. Gore Vidal to see how quickly and effectively this transforming, diluting, disintegrating machinery can work.

In America, the only way to escape the consequences of great success is to escape literally and physically. This is doubtless why Mr. William Faulkner is inaccessible in his Southern home, why Mr. Steinbeck is elusive, why Mr. Hemingway now lives in Cuba. Paradoxically, the publicization of contemporary American literature, contributes to the disruption of any community of letters in America. The successful writer, dazed by the irrelevances of a success which has little to do with recognition of his best qualities and which robs him of his deepest experiences, escapes somewhere (if he is sensible) hugging his precious talent. Instead of being now the boy from the Middle West with the Hard Luck story, he becomes the poor rich boy clinging to his æsthetic conscience. Alcoholism, the occupational disease of the successful American writer, can surely be explained at least in part as an effort to restore contact with the dionysiac, the violent, the real, the unconscious level of experience, by those who have been cut off by success from their roots.

But failure is perhaps even more disastrous than success in America. In Europe, after all, success and failure are comparative terms, particularly failure. One has the feeling that the European failure is often a kind of secret success, at any rate among a small circle. It is possible to envy Keats the position he enjoyed in Leigh Hunt's circle, or Gide his reputation when his publishers had sold only a few copies of *Paludes*, or Rilke when he commanded the attention of only a few princesses. But in America there are scarcely these public failures who are secretly private, highly superior successes. There is a lack of the sense within a civilization which is changing and expanding so rapidly, that if one misses one's time, another time will discover one. The future will be so different from the present that there could not be much consolation in such a thought anyway. Failure, therefore, like success, has something definite, final about it. It creates a gulf which separates the unsuccessful writer from America. The young writer is confronted with a dramatic choice between success, with the kind of gigantic systematic exploitation of misunderstanding which it involves, success of one's inferior qualities through the medium of one's best ones, or failure which leads to an isolation almost as complete as success. The fact that certain writers deliberately refuse success and even choose failure, does them

enormous credit. Yet they sacrifice more than reward by making this choice. For the vitality of America is so enormously absorbed into the myth of a great success story, that to reject success is to reject a great part of the experience of America. There is a bitterness of the rejecting and the rejected about American literary failures.

Probably I have oversimplified in drawing this black-and-white contrast between success and failure, and I shall qualify the picture in a moment. What is important, though, is to emphasize that the American writer is confronted by a number of choices any one of which tends in the long run to isolate him, to dramatize his position within a society where there are writers, some good, some bad, some successful, some unsuccessful, but no literary life, no considerable public sustainedly and discriminatingly interested in seeking out the best, a kind of jury of middle-class middling readers to whom the European writer after all continually addresses his appeals, restates his case, and on whose judgment he is prepared to wait for twenty years if necessary. Also I wish to show that the choice between success and failure is not a simple choice between corruption and integrity, although the writer who refuses success would maintain that it is. Failure means putting oneself outside the preoccupations of the greater part of American life and placing oneself within a perhaps embittered Greenwich Village group, or perhaps a sophisticated university one. It may mean withdrawing into a voluntary exile in some part of the country and issuing from time to time those vituperative messages against the whole of America which characterize the work of Henry Miller and his followers. Success also means isolation but it is the experience of a form of loneliness which is the lot of a great many successful Americans. The successful American writer can and sometimes does absorb into his work some of the dynamism of American materialism.

The qualifications which rather modify my picture of the writer who rejects success is that he can to some extent exploit his by-products, just as the successful one can. In many universities today there are 'poets in residence'; e.g., Paul Engel at Iowa, Karl Shapiro at Baltimore, and other writers, besides poets, are coming more and more to seek work at colleges and universities. Another way of tiding over unsuccess is to be supported by some Trust or obtain one of the many literary awards offered by the Great Foundations, such as Rockefeller* and Guggenheim.

* The Rockefeller Foundation also does much to help British writers in the present crisis. Last year it gave thirty-four young writers Atlantic Awards.

The American universities are to a large extent subsidizing American contemporary literature. In fact, one can foresee a day when American literature might be divided into two channels: the commercialized success and the subsidized commercial failure. Such a development might not be entirely bad, but it would tend to increase a division which is already apparent, of American writing, on the one hand into that which can be exploited by the Book Clubs and Hollywood transformed into something which sells to a wide public for other than literary reasons; and on the other hand into that which is highly intellectualized, critical in spirit, hermetic, self-conscious, writing by writers for writers communicating in a highly allusive idiom with each other. The popular work adapted to popular misconceptions might well sometimes prove to be a masterpiece, as might also the exclusive and literary. But between the two extremes of commercialization and academic exclusiveness the communication of literature with an effectively wide cultivated public would not exist.

The universities, like the Trusts, render a great service to the best American writers. But nevertheless a university post tends to isolate a writer within his academic surroundings, hundreds of miles away from the nearest 'poet in residence' at another university. A result of turning writers into university teachers is surely the immense and massive concentration on literary criticism which fills so large a space of the literary periodicals. Some of this criticism is excellent. Yet the enormous energy devoted to producing volume after volume of research into Henry James by now resembles one of the massive American industries. A good deal of talent which might be creative is diverted into critical channels by conditions which make critical research a 'safe' subsidized literary task, and where in universities published criticism is a good way of gaining Faculty advancement.

The choice between success and unsucccess is underlined by the situation of American publishing. American publishers cannot make publishing pay unless they sell books almost on the scale of mass production to a public amongst whose pleasures reading does not seem to count very high. Books are therefore sold on their value as sensation, or on the exploitation of such attractive characteristics as their authors may be supposed to have, through Book Clubs, to a public which is not encouraged to develop a taste of its own. One of the things that strikes the visitor to America is the remarkable scarcity of good book shops, which are hardly to be found outside a few in the great cities. The only book shop in most towns is the drug store, where books are sold by shop-keepers who naturally stock only those which are in the

widest demand. In fact, the sale of books through Book Clubs and advertising of their sensational features is conducted on the same lines, but with less selectivity, as the sale of automobiles or soap.

The very steep rise in costs since the war, together with the effects of a post-war slump in the public interest in literature, has made this situation much worse, and has exaggerated its worst features. A book, to cover costs, must now sell approximately 10,000 copies (this is a very large figure for a book which does not rank as a best-seller). It is unhealthy for publishing to get into the condition where the sale of 1,000 or 2,000 copies of a book does not at least cover costs. One result of the pressure on publishers to sell larger quantities of each book they publish is direct and indirect pressure on writers to write books which will sell in large quantities. It becomes increasingly more difficult to publish a first book, unless this achieves the orthodoxy of sex and sensation which is becoming to a best-seller. 'Editors', introduced into publishing houses, suggest to writers how they should alter their books in order to make plot and character exciting and saleable. Books are even altered and rewritten in some cases by the same 'editors'. The Hollywoodization of literature whereby books are written with a view to their being bought by the film companies now takes another form whereby publishers imitate the methods of Hollywood and show a tendency to treat manuscripts as scripts to be rewritten to supply the supposed demands of the public. It is not unthinkable that American publishing houses will one day employ professional writers who systematically shape into synthetic best-sellers the manuscripts submitted to them by a sad dying-out race of creative writers. Some editors are already in touch with promising young writers at universities, 'discovering' them and at the same time revealing to their innocent minds that writing is one thing, and selling what one writes quite another. The teachers of creative writing 'courses' cannot altogether ignore in their teaching 'the market' and what this implies; what it implies, indeed, is that you either have to get on to it or be a teacher of a creative writing course.

The, by now, quite disastrous situation of publishing is not entirely a fatality which has happened to the publishers through no fault of their own. To some extent it is a result of what appears to be megalomaniac folly. Many publishers seem to belong to a curious race of dispirited exiles moving between Bohemia and Big Business, not quite sure in their own minds whether they are talentless artists or frustrated industrialists. In America most of them seem to have decided that the solution of their psychological problem is to model their business on mass sales by mass

advertising whilst endeavouring to pervert writers to be workers producing a commodity which can be sold by such methods. It is piously hoped, of course, that profits will permit always of a little loss on prestige publishing, which is, after all, a form of advertisement. Some New York publishers keep up air conditioned offices in huge luxuriously furnished buildings which are on the scale of the offices of the most profitable capitalist enterprises. There they explain to the young writer with a promising manuscript that they cannot afford to give him an advance during the time that he is making the alterations to his book which their 'editors' so reasonably recommend. With their enormous 'overheads', sumptuous offices and luxuriously travelling 'editors' looking for 'new talent', the scale of their publishing is related to Hollywood and Big Business but not to the modest scale of contemporary literature.

A few publishers, such as James Laughlin of *New Directions*, resist this tide, by devoting their private means to the publication of striking new work which may not command a large public. But such businesses, although they at least are able to publish the work of a few young writers, are not able to solve the really crucial problem, which is to find an American public not so large as to swamp all taste and judgment, and not so small as to be unable to support new writers to the extent that they are able to earn a livelihood from writing.

The general effect of increasing commercialization and of the compulsion to sell ever larger and larger quantities of a few books to a public which does not really care about books, must surely be that the position of the writer who writes as well as he possibly can 'to please himself', becomes less tenable. Even if one does not altogether agree with æsthetic self-centredness, it must be admitted that the first novels of James Joyce, Ernest Hemingway, D. H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, Christopher Isherwood, Cyril Connolly, and many others, have been written out of such an attitude. Indeed, most writers drop themselves as their own best audience all too soon. But it seems that today the unsaleable first book (which is somehow so important a basis of literary integrity) is becoming a romantic conception, like the attic where masterpieces are painted by starving artists. The Millers, Patchens, Rexroths, and a few others who still just survive in works devoted to creating defiant gestures, are perhaps the last remnants of a race of independent writers who are being superseded by the novelist whose literary training is a training in self-commerce, by the poet who seeks a job where he may become teacher in writ-

ing poetry at a university. Here, of course, I am anticipating what has not yet happened, but it is worth doing so in order to challenge the tendency of many people to think that somehow the situation of writers remains always the same, always difficult but always overcome.

Perhaps the greatest surprise in the literary situation for the visitor to America, is to discover the lack of any large, consciously cultivated reading public, interested, almost as a matter of duty, in seeking out and supporting the best contemporary writing. I am thinking of the kind of public which, before the war, read the *Nouvelle Revue Francaise* in France, and which in England reads the *Times Literary Supplement*, the *New Statesman and Nation*, *Horizon* and *New Writing*. In my own mind, I reckon this reading public as being drawn from about 30,000 to 50,000 people who are interested in contemporary cultural developments. Of these, perhaps 2,000 would read a work which was recommended to them as being of high interest. This public in Britain and France supplies a reservoir of goodwill on which publishers and writers can draw to give a modicum of support to originality.

When one compares the American with the European situation, one sees that in Europe the reading public of 30,000 to 50,000 has organs of opinion and a considerable degree of self-awareness. It has its weekly and monthly periodicals which have a personal almost family air of being by and about people who know very well one another's interests, in striking contrast to the strenuous efforts of a periodical such as *The Saturday Review of Literature* to 'sell' culture. The existence of these periodicals supported by interested readers means that publishers can get in touch easily through advertising in them with exactly that public which is most interested in experimental work.

It is difficult to believe that in America a similar public does not exist. Surely amongst all those people who go to lectures, belong to women's clubs, attend hundreds of 'creative writing' courses, there must be several thousand capable of developing independent literary tastes of their own, and a pride in supporting the best contemporary American literature. I suspect that this public has never been sought out, because the large publishers are too intent on larger quarry, whilst the editors of the small reviews do not want to break out of their exclusiveness. I remember very well an evening in New York when a young Belgian publisher and myself tried to persuade the editors of one of the best small American periodicals that it would be worth spending some of a few thousand dollars which had been given them by a patron, on sending one of their editors on a tour of the students

of 'creative writing' courses to gain the support of the students who should be the most interested public of this review. We both had the impression during this conversation that the editors of this review did not want to raise their circulation above its figure of less than 10,000. Its smallness fortified them in a sense of their exclusiveness which they did not wish to lose.

The best weekly review, *The Nation*, does not have the breadth which would come from its reaching the intellectual life of a group as large as that which supports the corresponding English reviews. *Partisan Review*, which has published the most interesting stories and articles appearing in America over a number of years, suffers also from that sense of limitation which makes one feel that to read it is to belong to a special group outside the rest of America. There is, as Sartre observed in an interview on American literature published in *Combat*, a tendency towards ossification in such narrowness, and he went on to observe that many American publications did not extend beyond their region of publication. A curious misunderstanding, I thought, reflecting on American methods of nation-wide distribution and communication, which tend to uproot regionalism and leave nothing except mere sense of locality which distinguishes, say, the Mid-West from the West and the East. Yet perhaps Sartre is right in the sense that there is a kind of transportable New York, southern and western regionalism, which travels through restricted channels to little pools of intellectual life all over the country.

After travelling in thirty States, and visiting about forty universities and colleges, I am convinced that there is a public which could support a periodical with a nation-wide circulation, larger than that of any existing periodical, but deliberately avoiding the huge circulations of the nation-wide reviews. Perhaps, though, even if there is such a public, the difficulties of distribution in order to reach it are insuperable. It would have to be reached through the news agencies and drug stores, and only the national circulations can reach them. The Either-Or of doing things on the very smallest or the very largest scale is to some extent implicit in the huge spaces, the thinly spread population and the organization arranged for the purpose of distributing mass-produced goods, of America. It occurs to me though that it might be possible to find alternative channels of distribution to the drug stores and news agencies, in clubs, universities and lecture societies.

I may well be wrong in thinking this. Two recent examples illustrate the difficulty of finding a mean between the excessively small and the excessively large circulation. Some years ago, the

management of *The New Republic* decided to extend the influence of that small but excellent weekly. They discovered that in order to cover the cost of any expansion a circulation of 250,000 was required. In the unsuccessful attempt to capture this circulation, *The New Republic* became that strange mongrel which seems to have been begotten by *Time* upon the body of the *New Statesman and Nation*, which grieves its former admirers today

A group of writers and journalists of distinction decided to produce as an experiment in co-operative publishing a monthly review called '47 (when it appeared in 1947: in 1948 the title became '48, upon which it ceased publication). Confronted by the drastic choice between very small and very large sales, they put their affairs into the hands of a sales manager, with the result that the new experiment conducted by distinguished writers became the usual pocket magazine with pin-up girl on cover and scratchy line drawings illustrating the letterpress.

The 'little reviews' have extremely small circulations and pay contributors very inadequately (the Rockefeller Foundation has done something to better this situation by subsidizing the rates of pay given to contributors, in some instances). One might say that the combined influence of the 'little reviews' in America now fails to represent an *avant-garde* or even any vital intellectual excitement. Although new reviews appear at intervals, there is nothing which corresponds to *The Dial*, or the old *Paris-American Transition*, no place where one can imagine the first work of a Joyce, an Eliot or a Hemingway appearing and being noticed in a way which would produce a widening wave of excitement. Perhaps here, as in some other respects, the situation is not just an American one. There seems to be a failure of *avant-garde* excitement in literature after this war throughout the world. Everywhere the many new reviews and publishers which have sprung up since the war have only produced an impression of inflation and diffuseness.

If one wished to publish a poem or story in America which would meet with the attention of an American *Intelligentzia*, one would be puzzled where to publish it. The 'little reviews' are, as I have said, 'little' to the point of complete ineffectiveness. The periodicals which maintain a high standard, and which are certainly widely distributed, such as *The Atlantic* and *Harpers* are devoted primarily to information and discussion of opinion: creative work takes second place in them. *The New Yorker*, superbly edited, is what is called a 'wonderful job': most writers who write for it are edited (or edit themselves) almost out of existence so

that everything in it appears to be by an anonymous body called *The New Yorker*. In fact, the great achievement of the American periodicals is to create a kind of signed anonymous journalism, in which articles and stories, although under the names of writers, bear the stamp of the editorial system.

'Editing' often means complete rewriting, turning the authentic, the personal, the poetic, into the kind of public language of the weekly news magazines. Here is an example of an 'edited' passage, as it appeared in a magazine with a wide circulation, of William Goyen's story '*The White Rooster*'. First, here is the original passage:

But Marcy Samuels was behind the bush, waiting, and while she waited her mind said over and over 'if he would die!' 'If he would die, by himself. How I could leap upon him, choke the life out of him. The rooster moved towards the pansies, tail feathers drooped and frayed. If he would die, she thought, clenching her fists. If I could leap upon him and twist his old wrinkled throat and keep out the breath.

Here is the 'edited' passage, as it appeared (without consulting the writer):

She watched at the window. The way the rooster came into her pansy bed, so serene and cocky, filled her with grudging admiration; and she hated him all the more for being so indestructible, so sure in his right to plague her. In his rags of feathers he strutted as though he owned her place . . .

and so on. The reader who reads Goyen's story will see that the scene has been changed, the action telescoped, the language altered, the rhythm destroyed, in order to produce a brittle kind of language, like that of the news stories. In fact, the result of 'editing' is that fiction comes to resemble journalism, and journalism fiction. The 'stories' in the news move in the same world of journalistic, glamourized unreality as the stories in the popular magazines. Both have been robbed of their authenticity; journalism of its directness; and fiction of its art.

The British writer who is not able to live from the sales of books but who is able to develop a secondary literary activity to support himself, has several advantages over his American colleague. He may have to work very hard, but the reviewing, broadcasting and other literary work which he may do to gain a livelihood will keep his name before the same public as reads his

books. In America, the possibilities of gaining a living from reviewing of the highest standard, and from broadcasting, are far less, and the writer is forced back to a greater extent than the British writer on some kind of patronage, or on selling himself more blatantly. The system of commercially sponsored broadcasting by many private broadcasting companies has practically excluded the great benefits which broadcasting might confer on American writers, and which they too might bring to broadcasting. In Britain programmes such as the Third Programme are an enormous help to contemporary British writers, and also writers bring to the radio talents which are worthy of a great country with a living culture. It is an unfortunate fact that all the gigantic radio networks and newspapers and cinemas in the United States are devoted night and day almost exclusively to advertising the very worst aspects of American civilization. The worst things that can be said about America cover hundreds of miles of American newspapers and films and are shouted from a hundred radio stations every day. The lack of opportunity for American writers to write for these media, without completely sacrificing their talents, does not help them and does not help America.

One or two radio programmes, such as the discussion of books on C.B.S. are exceptions to this vociferous black picture. Also some of the fashion magazines, *Vogue*, *Mademoiselle*, *Harper's Bazaar*, *Town and Country*, show remarkable enterprise in encouraging the best short-story writers and even the poets. But the fashion magazines, where poems and stories are buried under hundreds of pages of advertisements for underwear, are scarcely a medium in which the writer can be said to 'appear'. He is, rather, rewardingly lost, as in a drawer crammed with artificial silks.

I am brought back then, to the fact, that what is lacking in America is a writing and a reading community, prepared to support the best in writing and reading. Certain developments, which seem puzzling to the foreigner, may indicate an instinctive movement towards such a community. One of these, is the 'creative writing' course, whose true significance may not be that university teachers can teach young writers to write, but that they can bring them together, make them discuss their work with one another, give them the sense of the background of a life of writing to which they belong. Another, is the writers' conferences, sponsored usually by the summer schools of universities. Here writers meet to discuss various problems of writing, and although few situations do more to arouse the worst emotions of writers

than to meet other writers, nevertheless these meetings are unexpectedly successful, perhaps because they respond to a real need of the American writers.

The American writer is the most isolated in the world. Unless he happens to come from Boston or New York, he is isolated in his youth in the West or Mid-West or South, and this isolation amid a kind of society which does not recognize the values of the artist, may remain throughout his life as the valid basis of his work, and he may always secretly remain ashamed of being a writer and not a 'tough guy'. He is isolated by the lack of cultural centres, corresponding to Paris and London, in which he may find a spiritual home. At a certain epoch, indeed, after 1920, Paris was a far truer centre of American literary life than any city in America. He is isolated by success which exploits his literary reputation and at the same time lifts him socially and economically both out of literature and out of his early sensitive experiencing, and he is isolated by failure which may tie him down to academic and critical work, and make him wish to intellectualize his talents to a point which is dangerous to his creativeness.

Yet the greatest achievements of American writing come out of this very isolation, this original loneliness within a deeply experienced environment where literature is derided, this later isolation within a success or unsuccess where it is still misunderstood. Intense loneliness gives all the great American literature something in common, the sense of a lonely animal howling in the dark, like the wolves in a story of Jack London, the White Whale chased across a waste of seas in Melville, the sensitive and exploitable young American seeking his own soul through ruined European palaces, of James. The recurrent theme of American literature is the great misunderstood primal energy of creative art, transformed into the inebriate, the feeling ox, the sensitive, the homosexual, the lost child.

When W. H. Auden explained that the reason he lives in America is because he can be alone there, he was at his most profound. The matey, the democratic country, is the natural home of homeless wanderers, incommunicable voices pouring themselves out without hope of reaching an audience, on reams of paper. In passages of *Finnegans Wake* there is a kind of reaching out of the Irish wanderer to America, and perhaps the great passionately formed yet formless masterpieces of this century, of James and Proust and Joyce, have a kinship with American literature. The loneliness of the American writer is significant because it corresponds to a very deep American experience, the

kind of experience which James touches on in his portraits of the millionaires dying side by side in the sketch of his last novel *The Ivory Tower*.

This isolation explains a perplexing feature of American writing—its emphasis on violence, brutality, decadence. Reading the novels of Faulkner, Hemingway, Steinbeck and the other contemporary American writers, one has the impression not of a vital, progressive society but of the Russia of Dostoevsky and Chekhov. Yet one can hardly accept this as a witnessing of America. For America is vital, young, optimistic, and in this way opposed to tired and disillusioned Europe. Or one America is like this. But there is another America, which is after all very old, very attached to Europe. A conflict is implicit in American civilization which is not really a young nation growing up in virgin country, but a collection of people with roots in very old countries living the life of a young country. Thus there is a tendency always in American culture to jump from the pioneering to the over-civilized: and within this tendency also a reaction against it. There is Walt Whitman and Henry James. The scene of the drama of America and Europe which is the theme of Henry James, is America itself, Boston and New York, more than Paris and Rome.

Someone once said that America was a country which had passed from primitive pioneering to decadence with no interval of cultivated civilization in between. It would be truer to say that primitivism, decline and vital civilizing forces all exist side by side at the same time in America. American literature reflects this co-existence of extremes, this loneliness of conditions which do not understand one another, this frustration and violence.

Europe has an intellectual life where people know themselves, and know each other and are known. Formerly American writers came to Europe to enter into this state of awareness and self-awareness. But a time can come when there is a movement of Europeans away from European self-awareness towards the American loneliness. This happens if European awareness becomes terrifying, chaotic and disillusioned, rather than harmonious, and poetic. It seems that we may have reached the stage when European awareness is awareness of a purpose which has gone out of life, an illusion which is lost. French existentialism is awareness of the meaninglessness of the real condition of being human and the arbitrariness of constructive and creative attitudes. But isolation is the only tolerable condition of work for the individual whose motives in creating and constructing are of a heroic arbitrariness. There comes a stage when a *knowing* com-

munity is one which knows that no one believes in the mission of this civilization any longer. In such conditions one may get little revivals—a sudden interest, let us say, of a group of English artists in the Pre-Raphaelites and Nineteenth-Century Gothic. But here everything descends below the level of the arbitrary gesture of public and artistic ‘engagement’ to the children’s game, the walks with the governess on the Downs.

It is better perhaps, then, to be alone. And for this reason the American loneliness has a great attraction for the European intellectual today. There has been a movement of English writers to America, and, were it not for language difficulties, one can scarcely doubt that there would be an emigration of European literary life on a considerable scale. Translations of contemporary American literature have swept the continent into a movement which is an invasion by external forces. American loneliness is now a magnet which pulls across the Atlantic as powerfully as Europe once pulled in the other direction. In America you are acquainted with everyone, but you are known by and get to know hardly anyone. There is no awareness of what you are up to; reputations, good or ill, are based on the most elementary and widely diffused misunderstandings.

So it would be wrong to condemn the American isolation of talent and to assert that it must be replaced by a literary community corresponding to the European one. At the same time, one must distinguish between two kinds of isolation for the writer, one creative and one sterile, and one must bear in mind that the existence of literature depends on a readers’ as well as a writers’ situation.

Productive loneliness perhaps expresses the American tragedy of a great continent without a centre. It is a loneliness of clarity free of the insidious intellectual connexions and commitments which now threaten to betray the individual European talent by involving it too much in the unbelief of a declining civilization.

The uncreative loneliness is a too facile acceptance of the separation of the writer’s particular situation from all others. It is the loneliness of the successful who sneer at the unsuccessful, of the unsuccessful who reject every possibility of success, of the poets who retire early into University careers and concentrate on tremendous labours of literary criticism, of the editors and publishers who allow policy to be dictated to them by sales managers, and equally of the editors who have no wish to expand their circulation beyond a tiny clique, the loneliness of those

who retire bitterly to the Mid-West or the Pacific coast, or of those who accept alcohol as their fatality and write with it and about it. This acceptance of partial situations is mechanical because it is a reflection of the segregating, specializing, commercializing tendencies of the whole of America.

The creative loneliness is, of course, the solving by individuals within their own work of the problems which society presents, so that the successful rises above the mere fortune of his success, and within conventions which the society accepts manages to create extremely vital work, as did Balzac and Dickens. There is a great vitality in America and Americans which permits of these miraculous solutions which somehow permit films which are masterpieces to be produced within the conditions imposed by Hollywood, novels which are masterpieces to be accepted by Book Clubs. Nevertheless the individual's capacity to solve the problem within his own work and life does not prevent the problem from being grave. And in America the lack of a middle-sized reading public, independent of Book Clubs and capable of choosing for itself, is the main cause of the extraordinary situation by which talent is less capable of supporting itself for what it is, and to do what it wants to do, than in most European countries. It is true that today the European writer is going through a very grave crisis, but this is largely induced by paper shortages and other difficulties of a purely material nature. The American malady is a spiritual one, the commercialization of spiritual goods on an enormous scale, in the same way as material things are commercialized. Everything which sells has to sell on advertised merits which are not its true quality, everything which is made, is made to satisfy a demand artificially stimulated by sales propaganda. In the country where culture is 'sold' enormously, it is sold as something other than culture and tends to become something else in the process. That real values nevertheless are maintained is the triumph of certain individuals who are able to enter into and survive this enormous success-machinery, and of others who reject it heroically.

AMERICANA

Robert Lowry

THERE WAS JUST ROOM enough for the three bartenders, the bottles they poured from, the women who giggled and tottered and jitterbugged on the four-by-four space, the twenty-three other soldiers, and Flaps and me. Mostly Flaps and I just drank, but now and then we'd look at each other and grin. Then we'd drink again. Flaps was pretty drunk but he wasn't too drunk to grin, and he could still get rid of his grin after he'd held it a minute. I believe I was grinning practically all the time now. I grinned at the bartender, two fat middleaged ladies standing next to me, a tall thin girl who didn't wear any brassiere under her flowered summer dress, and a big Irish soldier whom I felt I knew because he looked like Victor McLaglen the movie star. It wasn't long before I was shaking Victor's hand and introducing him to Flaps as an old friend of mine. "A very very *very* old friend, Flaps," I said, slapping Victor on the back to emphasize the point. Flaps put on an extra big smile for Victor, held it for two minutes, then took it off and finished the drink in his glass. Victor wished us well, you could see that. The first thing he did was try to introduce us to the two fat middleaged ladies. When I told him they were both aunts of mine, great-aunts at that, on my mother's side, he got apologetic and said he hadn't meant anything by it. He told us he was from an army post in El Paso and just over here in Sloppy Joe's Bar in Juarez for a little recreation, and I told him we were up from an army camp in Douglas, Arizona on a three-day pass and this was the second night of it. He slapped us both on the back and said he was all in favor of three-day passes. "I got gonorrhea on my last one," he said. When he found out Flaps was from Chicago and I was from Detroit, we all became really great friends—it seems he'd passed through both towns several times. We had straight shots of bourbon and drank a toast "to the lovely and unsurpassed

virgins of Chicago, Detroit and East Hoboken." East Hoboken was his idea, his mother'd been born there.

Then before I knew it he was whispering about the blonde number at the other end of the bar. Actually two blonde numbers, but I could only see one of them. His eye was on the buxom, full-lipped one. The other was thin, small-breasted, plainer, but with a certain fragile beauty about her. "You gotta meet em," Victor said. He must have been shooting a line at them before because they did smile when he dragged me up to them and said he wanted them to know a friend of his from Chicago. I talked to the thin one about what a swell time I was having and could I buy her a drink, she said no and then a skinny grayhaired guy said "Let's go," and a sloppy fat woman with one badly crossed eye stumbled against the bar and answered, "Oh, all right, let's." And so the four of them, the scrawny guy, the crosseyed woman and the two blondes marched toward the door in single file. As she went by me I grabbed the blonde's hand and she smiled and let her hand slip out of mine, saying, "Come on over to the Chicago Club, honey."

It was the same thing at the Chicago Club, I don't know how we ever found room in there, everybody standing on his ear and a four-piece Mexican band playing "Let Me Call You Sweet-heart" with out-of-tune instruments. There were so many people I couldn't see her anywhere. Then I saw them, the four of them all squeezed around a table not much bigger than a flapjack—and drunk, drunk and sitting at considerable angles. The old man had more than his share of both drink and angles, he might have been in swimming the way he kept flailing his arms around. Finally the thin blonde saw me and smiled and said, "Come on!"

I never did know enough to say no to a thin blonde with plenty of fragile beauty here and there about her, I went over and she introduced the crosseyed woman as her ma, the swimming little grayhaired guy as her pa, and the big blonde as her sister Dorothy. She herself was named Evelyn, she admitted. Swell, I said, and sat down. We all started drinking rum collins and it went on for hours. We spilled them on our clothes, our shoes, the table, the floor, passersby. In turn passersby spilled things on us. I had thirty-five cents' worth of tequilla poured down my back. Flaps came over and sat down too, and Victor made for the fat woman. He wasted no time, he had her bent halfway to the floor before she could introduce herself. "I love love," I told Evelyn. "I love love all over everywhere, don't you?"

A big tear came in her eye and she looked far away and then back at me. "Yes," she said. It was extremely dramatic and touching—just that simple "Yes." She threw her arms around my neck and gave me a mouth to kiss that was like a deep well of rabbit fur. "Oh Harry—*please* love me, Harry." I was pretty well prepared to do that. "I'm from Louisville, Kentucky, I'm a telephone operator. I'm just down here visiting my folks. They like to do such different things than I do." She waved her hand toward her father, mother and sister. "I don't really like to drink," she said, "I don't know why I do it. I never did it before. I like higher type people." "I like both types," I said, "particularly yours." With that she kissed me again and she could really kiss. Had rather a full mouth. Could hold her breath for hours.

"Let's pretend we're married," she said. "Oh Harry, please pretend you're married to me." "Yeah," I said. "Oh Harry, you've got to be married to me just for tonight." "Sure, all night."

"This is my husband," she said to several people standing around. They didn't seem in the least interested. "Mother, this is my husband." But mother was still in Victor's death-grip. Soldiers and sailors kept coming up and tapping Evelyn on the shoulder to ask her to dance, but she only said, "Oh no, no I couldn't possibly, this is my husband here!"

"That's right," I said, having some difficulty locating her in the fog, "we're just like husband and wife now." "But don't start anything!" she said. "Don't think you're going to get away with anything." "Forget it," I said. "Oh but please love me," she said. "I will," I answered, getting into the swing of the conversation, "I will always love you." "And write to me when you go back to Douglas. And I'll come to see you—I will, I really will!"

With that she buried her head in her arms and sobbed. She also knocked her rum collins over on my shoes, but I didn't mind, she couldn't make them any wetter.

Then she wanted me to play "Put Your Little Foot." "I don't know how to play it," I said, but she said, "No, no, make the band play it." I went over and paid a quarter to have "Put Your Little Foot" run through, the Mexicans are very commercial about this sort of thing and have a standard price. We tried dancing, but "Foot" turned out to be strictly mountain music and I get pretty lost when I start bouncing around the floor like that and kicking my legs up high. Besides, I couldn't keep her standing straight—she was limp as an old sock.

"Let's go out and walk," I said.

When we went back to the table we discovered the old man had lost his wallet. "One hundred and five dollars gone—my pension!" he squealed, crawling frantically around the floor, peering under tables and chairs, collecting nothing but kicks and shoves from everyone.

We got Evelyn's coat and I helped her across the dance floor. Her sister Dorothy was dancing with a big sailor who held his hand far down on her back and leered into her eyes.

The street was as crazy as indoors, crowded with people gone goofy with the big jazz of the war, everybody drunk and laughing and yelling. Fights between soldiers, women draped over gutters, a corporal chasing a Mexican girl up the middle of the street. We fought our way along to the International Bridge. She kept trying to go to sleep in my arms. She laughed and giggled at times, at other times cried and asked me to love her forever.

We were almost to the bridge when I looked around and saw Victor and the old lady. That was just fine, we were going to be chaperoned. And her husband probably still back there pawing around the floor.

"Catch a cab on the other side," Victor said. I wondered how he was going to get by the MPs on the bridge without a cap, but he did it all right, they just checked our passes and we went through.

In the cab it turned out that the old lady didn't consider herself a chaperon after all, she'd clamped her jaws on Victor before the driver even got his car in gear. I had the beauty of the family, but Victor had the fun. I'd no sooner put my arm around Evelyn than she sat up straight as a board and said, "Don't start anything, don't think you're going to get away with anything." You can take that kind of talk in the Chicago Club, where you wouldn't be able to start anything anyhow, but not here with the taxi meter already ticking away. "What's the matter, kid?" I asked. "I might look like Frankenstein but I wouldn't hurt a bug." With that she really collapsed—drenched my shoulder in tears and bruised it with the bobbing of her head. "No you don't, you don't at all!" "Don't what?" "Don't *really* love me!" I put my arm around her to reassure her and that shut off the tears, she was stiff as a mummy immediately.

"Right here," Victor said. The cab squealed into the curb. I was all for getting out too, but Evelyn's hand was on my arm. "We're going on," she said. I'd had some idea about where we

were going—Flaps and I shared a hotel room with a bottle in it—but I sat back in the seat and let her take over. She mumbled something to the driver and the cab shot off, leaving Victor and his prize standing back there in front of a delicatessen store.

I was a long way from being sure just what she had in mind. She didn't get any friendlier now that her mother was out of the way, and if she really preferred the puritan way of life, I was beginning to see my way clear to letting her have it—alone. We sat silently for a nice five-mile drive. Out the cab window I saw the business district thin out, then we hit a highway. "Where the hell are we going?" She acted as though she hadn't heard me. She did look pretty sick slumped there in the corner, and her thin white serious face no longer worked any wonders of sex on me.

Here we were in civilization again—small houses down both sides of the street. "Which one?" the driver asked. She leaned out the cab window. "Here! Here!" The cab stopped dead with a shiver, and I plumped two dollars and fifty-five cents into the driver's hand. By the time I'd turned around, she was already halfway up the walk, running. It was a tiny, box-like frame house, like all the other tiny, box-like frame houses on the street except that it was set farther back in its yard. Directly over the chimney was the biggest reddest moon Texas ever saw, and beyond for God knows how many hundreds of miles was the desert. I noticed that a light was on in the house—it couldn't mean anything worse than a two-hundred-pound husband waiting up for her.

She slammed the door behind her just as I reached the porch steps. I waited outside for an invitation, but all I could hear was her screaming. So I opened the door and went in. The unshaded bulb suspended from the ceiling blinded me for a minute. When I got my eyes adjusted I saw that she'd thrown herself on the brass double bed over in the corner. "He's going to die!" she was screaming. "He's going to die!"

"Who's going to die?" I asked the little girl standing by the bed.

"He's got a fever," she said. "That's her little boy."

The little girl's face was as simple and wide-staring as that moon outside. She might have been eight years old. Straight dark-blond hair hung down to the tips of her ears, and under the round blue eyes, across the nubbin of a nose, was a faint splash of freckles.

"Who are you?"

"My name is Jo Anne. She's my aunt."

I moved round her to try to see the little boy, but his mother seemed determined that if he didn't die any other way, she'd smother him. Anyhow it was no place for me, I went to the door.

"Don't go! Don't you dare go!"

She was sitting up, her eyes as ragged as two holes burnt in paper, her lipstick smeared clear round to her cheek, her hair like straw somebody has poked with a stick. I went back and stood in front of her. Now I could see the little boy—a hot rosy three-year-old face with feverish eyes and a spray of blond hair plastered on the perspiring forehead. I reached out to touch his forehead when she screamed: "Don't! Don't touch him!" Wailing and sobbing, she ran into the next room. I picked up the chair she'd knocked over and followed her. "What's the matter?" I asked. "Let's get a doctor for your little boy." "He's sick, he's going to die!" she wailed. She jumped up. "I hate everyone, everything! You!"

A nice scene to be in on. I walked out of the room. Jo Anne was using the telephone. After she'd hung up she said, "I called Big Bill. Tell her I called Big Bill."

"You better call a doctor," I said.

"He's kind of a doctor. He comes when we're sick and gives us medicine the same way as a doctor."

Bam, crash, wham, from the next room. I ran in there and just missed connecting with a dish. She was breaking up everything she could lay hand on. The table was overturned and dishes were smashing against the wall. "Let's stop this," I said, though frankly it wasn't any of my business. She threw a cup at me and ran back into the front room. "My letters!" she screamed. "Where are my letters?" She caught Jo Anne a hard one across the face. "You stole my letters!" Without a tremor, with only the five red finger marks on her white cheek to show she'd been hit, Jo Anne turned and began searching through a drawer. "Here they are," she said quietly.

They were all loose, and when Evelyn grabbed them from Jo Anne's hand half of them spilled on the floor. Evelyn got down there, yanking them from their envelopes, scattering them still more. "In India!" she was mumbling. "My husband's in India and he's never coming back! Where's that letter he says he's never coming back to me?" She wouldn't have been able to read it in her present state if she'd found it. "My letter!" she screamed. "You stole my letter!"

But Jo Anne had turned away, she was opening the front door. "It can't be Big Bill," she said, "he never comes in a taxicab."

It was Victor and the old lady, they were both as gone as two people can be. Victor was doing better than Ma, her crossed eye seemed to have melted completely into her nose so that only the white showed, and her dress was ripped down the front. Victor carried half a bottle of whiskey in one hand and held up the old lady with the other.

"Whash goin on here?" she asked, seeing her daughter on the floor weeping among the letters. "C'mon, honey, don' pay no 'tention." Not even glancing at the little boy, who'd sat up in bed to see the new arrivals, she led Victor on into the other room, where she cursed the broken glass. A door closed back there but you could still hear them carrying on.

I'd had enough, I went outside. The desert air felt good, but the moon was gone now. I heard the door open and close softly—the little girl was standing beside me.

"It's a nice night," I said.

"I always sit on the porch late at night," she said.

"They leave you alone like this all the time?"

"Oh yes," she said. "But I don't care. I like it better here than Kentucky. We've been here a month—there are more places to play. I guess we're going to stay here with my grandma—I guess till the war ends and my daddy comes home."

"Big Bill better get here pretty soon," I said. "Your cousin looks sick."

"He's not really so sick, he just cries when my aunt leaves him. He cried all evening." She looked up at me. "Where did you meet my aunt?"

"I met her through a friend," I said, feeling that accuracy wasn't important at the moment. Then I lied: "I just came along home with her because she wasn't feeling good enough to come alone."

"She brings fellows home all the time," she said, reproaching me for lying. And then, looking straight ahead, added: "You didn't see my mother, did you?"

"She went to a movie."

I was glad I didn't have to say more. A tin lizzie had drawn up in front of the house and a tub of a man wearing a ten-gallon hat and boots was getting out.

"Big Bill!"

"Guess I'll be going," I said. But she wasn't paying any more attention to me, she'd run down the walk to meet him and now they were coming back hand in hand.

I let them pass me and walked on out to the street. I hiked half a mile to the highway, and finally a cab loaded with people picked me up and took me to the bridge. I don't know what made me want to go back into Mexico to the Chicago Club. Flaps couldn't still be there, it was quarter to twelve and soldiers were flooding through the MP gate before their passes expired.

I saw from the door that the place was almost deserted. The Mexican jazz band had left, and only a few soldiers were draped along the bar finishing their drinks. Flaps was sitting alone at the table where I'd left him. His cap was planted on the back of his round Norwegian head, the way he wore it, and his eyes weren't looking too good. "Hi," I said, slumping down beside him, "haven't we met somewhere?"

"Just a real good solid American family," Flaps said. "When we go overseas next month I'm going to fight my head off for all of this." He looked at me. "I hope you did all right."

"Oh, I did fine," I said. "Just fine."

"You left me with papa."

"I know. Did he find his money?"

"Not a trace of it—but he had more in another pocket. I've just been sitting here for two hours listening to his life story. He's from Louisville, a repairman for the street railway, and he managed to get himself ruptured lifting a bus or something so he came down here to settle down on the money they gave him."

"Sounds like an interesting evening."

"More interesting than that. I finally found out what he was up to when his hand started running up and down my leg under the table."

"What?"

"Queer as a zulu bird."

I don't know why I started laughing then. I only wished that the bar hadn't closed.

EIGHT POEMS

FEELTHY POMES

I. LILY

Umbular dumbular diffident moll
dat de playpals punched in de sporting hall—
I knewed her on Frewsday, she uster get whipped
by a marn in a beard bedwinked & well clipped.

Fiddled by doughboys, glasseyed & banged
she'd larf & she'd gurgle & wish she was hanged.
"I am the mooiest globular cow
the brewiest, the wooiest cow what knows how.

"I onct had a datter, I onct had a marn
I onct had a wiste with a twinty inch sparn.
I'm narthing to lookut, I'm narthing to feel
just onct I was harpy, just onct I was real

"Just onct I was meeried & lived in a room
the gars stove was broken, the dilya dint bloom
my marn was a bookie, he larfed when I cried
he larfed when he beat me, he larfed when I sighed

"My datter's the littlest thing you kin see
little & rid & quiet is she
she niver does spik, she niver does wip
buried & daid before she could crip.

"So now I'm a cow, a moeey ole cow
the brewiest wooiest cow what knows how
I'm banged fer a livin, I'm banged fer a thrill
I'm banged by a marn in a beard fit to kill

"I don't give a piddle, I don't give a flark
I don't give a diddlin ole twitch of my twark
I'm daid & I know it, daid & laid out
on a couch at the Rid Moon, the twintieth bout."

That umbular dumbular diffident moll!
harndled by rapesters, flarndled by all—
drim of a spangle, drim of a coil
little you knewed in yr hoit-me-goot woild
yr rilly a poil.

II. COW

Once upon a time a cow
came
undressed & as cows come: lumbular
mooful
& with the big sack swinging
came into Tootletown that sunny day—
came into sinful, sunful, slyful, slothful
Tootle a town with each sin
pinkpantycovered: this cow
came slow & as cows
come—down the middle
of Tootle Street, oh! undressed!
naked! cow!
BANG!
went doors
OH!
went screams
SAY!
went men—Tootle men, little men
behind their window panes.
But one named Burtlesby braver
than the rest stayed out (though behind
a tree & with his sheriff badge

in view), cried: COW!
 But the cow, lumbular,
 came
 as cows will come
 naked
 unpinkpantycovered
 chewing mostly
 looking—living
 at both ends
 including the most undressed one—
 walked right through
 Tootletown
 that sinful sunful summer day & out
 again, to its square field
 its fence & grass & little
 brook—unconscious of the hoots & howls
 in Tootletown, the HORROR at so much
 NATURE
 lumbering, playful,
 assinthelightofdayful.

Report: 3 Tootles died, one Tootle girl
 had fainting fits, & Tootle mamas warned
 their Tootle kids against such
 sinful things as
 cows.

III. HORNY HOGAN

Critchers! Horny Hogan sayed
 & walked his beat—beat his walk
 & saw loif larf, loif cree—
 Critchers! Horny scorfed, & spart.

Oi arm the cocker here! Moi
 brarss poilished & moi gon in order
 Oi arm the cocker, mocker, bocker,
 jocker of em all.

Bibies, little winch, twinty-foive
 pinnies fer a chonk of luv—
 lovers, sodjers, shoppers, sharpers,
 mogs pinny-woise & por

lil ones so hoi what nid pertixion—
 Oi arm the cocker here! Horny
 Hogan sayed. Oi'll sive the larsies,
 Oi'll kip the fithe!

Didee? Did Horny Hogan kipit?
 Did Horny Hogan kip the larsies
 sife & sound from ivil? Woulduv,
 rilly woulduv but that he loiked to flarndle

Loiked to flup too much, did Horny,
 fer a cop, perticted blonduns,
 riduns & brunettes, gave em
 the long orm of the lar

Overdid it somut, did Cocker
 Mocker Horny Hogan—gave full pertixion to
 one too miny ridid, one too miny
 blornde—did it ifter hours ivin

till the Force foundim daid one
 cool sprin mornin, still pertictin, still
 kipin the fithe, shot at his post in a

tinth strit room, the horsband disappeared
 & the blornde there wippin—
 Horny Hogan daid! Horny
 Hogan—kipper of the fithe

Horny Hogan, the cocker mocker of em all.

* * *

RAILROAD TOWN

The dark train waiting, the fire, the quiet
 railroad houses huddled dark along the track, o far
 to where? the whistle cries, o far
 to where! the train-of-childhood's
 smokestack & pistons driving hard, the fearsome
 huffingpuff, the becapped man with furious
 lantern waving, the leaning out of engine & the hand
 on throttle! Go! Go! the whistle cries & from the west

& east, straight as the tracks from town to everywhere
the train of childhood cries, bewoff, bewoff
(be off) . . .

Who dreams here
at night, in the maze of streets
of our railroad town?—nothing moves,
nothing awake now but the leaning streetlamp
flickering, but the half-fed dog
sniffing off lids of garbage cans—
Who listens here? in every house big snores
& smaller breathings, children & older ones curled
& dreaming through the night, & one car, daring,
at lane's end, lights out, where
lovers lie . . . (the thin dog whines) you waken
& are no one, everyone, young & old, lying
in your bed when you are nine & no age, the train,
the train alone alive! the trainwheels moving! the
huff-puff-huff-huff-huff, the stutter of steam, the
ten million pounds of iron banging, on the move, the crazy
lantern whirling, the warning the whistle gives, the warning
you hear alone, & the regular beating of the hundred
cars past the crossing & on, cattle lowing & sheep bleating,
shifting
of heavy steel, of coal, of cargo
for Kansas, hurry-hurry all wheels say (already
the engine is out of town & sounds its whistle of far
to where) *o you will not be there . . .*

THE LITTLE PLACE

Upstairs & down
we will live, in the sandpaper rooms
where the chairs are wobbly, and the table
can't stand on its legs

With the shades up high
our eyes will be the windows, and our heart
the radiator—warm, we will forget
the cracked teacups & the broken radio.

Safe, safe we are when the wind tries to reach us.
Look, no tree will want to clutch our window, no blade
of grass can trip us up. We two, safe,
will dream the world around us, our moon being

a butter slab on a blue & white saucer, our house
one room, up or down, anywhere,
our street the space between us
anytime.

SUMMER SUNDAY

Little spotted day all polkadot
& sun up there
& the flags in the garden
& the grass like camel's hair
brown on the lawn.

Little kid-car all filled with
little kids comes flying around the corner
to our street. Company to your house.
The car is emptied.
Aunt Mamie waddles up the walk.
Uncle Willie stands like a giraffe just swallowed
a rubber ball.
Grrrf-grrrf the back-seat of little kids goes,
ready for cops & robbers & to steal your
scooter.

Summer day in America with laughter
& polkadots & the new starched dresses
of the school girls.
Aunt Mamie-Uncle Willie, that
trylon-perisphere pair
come up the walk already
panting, sweating, anxious
to be seated now, filled full of
nothing
& Sunday boredom
& damned anxious to let you know.

TWO WAR POEMS

I

Under the bombing-o was love,
love cried above the 10-pounder's scream
and at the core of the bombed building
yes, you guessed it
love.

When our ship got smashed
and we floundered, splashing
5 hours in the cold water, that was
principally: love (the submarine captain
looked at us with field glasses, then
closed his hatch and sailed away) and
good old love came with the sing of
shells at salerno, and I smelled that sly and coy
creature when naples
fell—o love!

Under the bombing-o was love, under the
smash of bodies in the lorry that the heinkel
hit. In all the pain and filth and waste of
war, that cute one, love, stuck up its head—

Love, with divaricated thighs: the world
turned up its fat old thighs and through the pain and change
of war
got fucked.

II

Orders taken here for the smaller things:
White thighs, Kentucky bourbon, Sir Walter Raleigh pipe tobacco,
home-made apple pie, barnyard scenes, and a ham-on-rye
are among the selections. Boats
for the USA will leave sometime soon
for some and sometime later
or (to put it bluntly) not at all

ROBERT LOWRY

for others. Doughboy in the mud
on the Sangro, place your order now! Rides
in a Buick up Canal Street, seats on the 50-
yard line for the Notre Dame game, one girl with an
upswept hairdo barelegged in wedgies each, or
a double-chocolate soda are on the order form—order now only
a limited selection for a limited time, time for the
big push and even dreams
are rationed—little guy in the mud playing
(bang! You're dead fall down)—life is like
something that never happened and death
is when you don't go home—here, make your choice now, will you
have 1 parked car (dark) with a girl named
Caroline or 1 more order of
what I mean hot
french fries—
Check here friend ()

RIMBAUD

PART TWO*

Henry Miller

Affinities, Analogies, Correspondence and Repercussions

IT WAS IN 1927, in the sunken basement of a dingy house in Brooklyn, that I first heard Rimbaud's name mentioned. I was then 36 years old and in the depths of my own protracted Season in Hell. An absorbing book about Rimbaud was lying about the house but I never once glanced at it. The reason was that I loathed the woman who owned it and who was then living with us. In looks, temperament and behavior she was, as I later discovered, as near to resembling Rimbaud as it is possible to imagine.

As I say, though Rimbaud was the all engrossing topic of conversation between Thelma and my wife, I made no effort to know him. In fact, I fought like the very devil to put him out of my mind; it seemed to me then that he was the evil genius who had unwittingly inspired all my trouble and misery. I saw that Thelma, whom I despised, had identified herself with him, was imitating him as best she could, not only in her behavior but in the kind of verse she wrote. Everything conspired to make me repudiate his name, his influence, his very existence. I was then at the very lowest point of my whole career, my morale was completely shattered. I remember sitting in the cold dank basement trying to write by the light of a flickering candle with a pencil. I was trying to write a play depicting my own tragedy. I never succeeded in getting beyond the first act.

In that state of despair and sterility I was naturally highly sceptical of the genius of a seventeen year old poet. All that I heard about him sounded like an invention of crazy Thelma's. I was then capable of believing that she could conjure up subtle torments with which to plague me, since she hated me as much

* The first part of Miller's study of Rimbaud was published in *New Directions IX*.

as I did her. The life which the three of us were leading, and which I tell about at length in *The Rosy Crucifixion*, was like an episode in one of Dostoevski's tales. It seems unreal and incredible to me now.

The point is, however, that Rimbaud's name stuck. Though I was not even to glance at his work until six or seven years later, at the home of Anais Nin in Louveciennes, his presence was always with me. It was a disturbing presence, too. "Some day you will have to come to grips with me." That's what his voice kept repeating in my ears. The day I read the first line of Rimbaud I suddenly remembered that it was of *Le Bateau Ivre* that Thelma had raved so much. *The Drunken Boat*! How expressive that title now seems in the light of all I subsequently experienced! Thelma meanwhile died in an insane asylum. And if I had not gone to Paris, begun to work there in earnest, I think my fate would have been the same. In that basement on Brooklyn Heights my own ship had foundered. When finally the keel burst asunder and I drifted out to the open sea, I realized that I was free, that the death I had gone through had liberated me.

If that period in Brooklyn represented my Season in Hell, then the Paris period, especially from 1932 to 1934, was the period of my Illuminations.

Coming upon Rimbaud's work at this time, when I had never been so fecund, so jubilant, so exalted, I had to push him aside, my own creations were more important to me. A mere glance at his writings and I knew what lay in store for me. He was pure dynamite, but I had first to fling my own stick. At this time I did not know anything about his life, except from the snatches Thelma had let drop years ago. I had yet to read a line of biography. It was in 1943, while living at Beverly Glen with John Dudley, the painter, that I first read about Rimbaud. I read Jean-Marie Carré's *A Season in Hell* and then Enid Starkie's work. I was overwhelmed, tongue-tied. It seemed to me that I had never read of a more accursed existence than Rimbaud's. I forgot completely about my own sufferings, which far outweighed his. I forgot about the frustrations and humiliations I had endured, the depths of despair and impotence to which I had sunk time and again. Like Thelma in the old days, I too could talk of nothing but Rimbaud. Everybody who came to the house had to listen to the song of Rimbaud.

It is only now, eighteen years after I first heard the name, that I am able to see him clearly, to read him like a clairvoyant. Now I *know* how great was his contribution, how terrible his tribulations. Now I understand the significance of his life and

work—as much, that is, as one can say he understands the life and work of another. But what I see most clearly is how I miraculously escaped suffering the same vile fate.

Rimbaud experienced his great crisis when he was eighteen, at which moment in his life he had reached the edge of madness; from this point on his life is an unending desert. I reached mine at the age of thirty-six to thirty-seven, which is the age at which Rimbaud dies. From this point on my life begins to blossom. Rimbaud turned from literature to life; I did the reverse. Rimbaud fled from the chimeras he had created; I embraced them. Sobered by the folly and waste of mere experience of life, I halted and converted my energies to creation. I plunged into writing with the same fervor and zest that I had plunged into life. Instead of losing life, I gained life; miracle after miracle occurred, every misfortune being transformed to good account. Rimbaud, though plunging into a realm of incredible climates and landscapes, into a world of phantasy as strange and marvelous as his poems, became more and more bitter, taciturn, empty and sorrowful.

Rimbaud restored literature to life; I have endeavored to restore life to literature. In both of us the confessional quality is strong, the moral and spiritual preoccupation uppermost. The flair for *language*, for music rather than literature, is another trait in common. With him I have felt an underlying primitive nature which manifests itself in strange ways. Claudel styled Rimbaud “a mystic in the wild state.” Nothing could describe him better. He did not “belong”—not anywhere. I have always had the same feeling about myself. The parallels are endless. I shall go into them in some detail, because in reading the biographies and the letters I saw these correspondences so clearly that I could not resist making note of them. I do not think I am unique in this respect; I think there are many Rimbauds in this world and that their number will increase with time. I think the Rimbaud type will displace, in the world to come, the Hamlet type and the Faustian type. The trend is towards a deeper split. Until the old world dies out utterly, the “abnormal” individual will tend more and more to become the norm. The new man will find himself only when the warfare between the collectivity and the individual ceases. Then we shall see the *human* type in its fullness and splendor.

* * *

To get the full import of Rimbaud's Season in Hell, which lasted eighteen years, one has to read his letters. Most of this time was spent on the Somali Coast, in Aden a number of years.

Here is a description of this hell on earth, from a letter to his mother:

"You cannot imagine the place: not a tree, even a withered one, not a sod of earth. Aden is the crater of an extinct volcano filled up with the sand of the sea. You only see lava and sand everywhere which cannot produce the slightest vegetation. It is surrounded by desert sands. Here the sides of the crater of our extinct volcano prevent the air from coming in and we are roasted as if in a lime-kiln."

How did a man of genius, a man of great energies, great resources, manage to coop himself up, to roast and squirm, in such a miserable hole? Here was a man for whom a thousand lives were not sufficient to explore the wonders of the earth, a man who broke with friends and relatives at an early age in order to experience life in its fullness, yet year after year we find him marooned in this hell-hole. How do you explain it? We know, of course, that he was straining at the leash all the time, that he was revolving countless schemes and projects to liberate himself, and liberate himself not only from Aden but from the whole world of sweat and struggle. Adventurer that he was, Rimbaud was nevertheless obsessed with the idea of attaining freedom, which he translated into terms of financial security. At the age of twenty-eight he writes home that the most important, the most urgent, thing for him is to become independent, no matter where. What he omitted to add was, *and no matter how*. He is a curious mixture of audacity and timidity. He has the courage to venture where no other white man has ever set foot, but he has not the courage to face life without a permanent income. He does not fear cannibals, but he fears his own white brethren. Though he is trying to amass a comfortable fortune, with which he can travel the globe leisurely and comfortably, or settle down somewhere should he find the right spot, he is still the poet and dreamer, the man who is unadapted to life, the man who believes in miracles, the man who is looking for Paradise in one form or another. At first he thinks that fifty thousand francs will be sufficient to secure him for life, but when he almost succeeds in accumulating this sum he decides that a hundred thousand would be safer. Those forty thousand francs! What a miserable, horrible time he has carrying this nest egg about with him! It is practically his undoing. When they carry him down from Harar to the coast in a litter—a journey, incidentally, comparable to the Calvary—his thoughts are frequently on the gold in his belt. Even at the hospital in Marseilles, where his leg is amputated, he is plagued with this nest egg. If it is not the pain which keeps him awake

nights it is the thought of the money which he has on him, which he has to hide so that it will not be stolen from him. He would like to put it in a bank, but how is he to get to a bank when he can't walk? He writes home begging some one to come and take care of his precious treasure. There is something so tragic and so farcical about this that one does not know what to say or think any more.

But what was at the root of this mania for security? The fear which every creative artist knows: that he is unwanted, that he is of no use in the world. How often in his letters does Rimbaud speak of being unfit to return to France and resume the life of the ordinary citizen. I have no trade, no profession, no friends there, he says. As do all poets, he sees the civilized world as the jungle; he does not know how to protect himself in it. Sometimes he adds that it is too late to think of returning—he is always speaking as though he were an old man!—he is too used to the free, wild, adventurous life to ever go back into harness again. The thing he had always loathed was honest toil, but in Africa, Cyprus, Arabia, he toils like a nigger, depriving himself of everything, even coffee and tobacco, wearing a cotton shift year in and year out, putting aside every sou he makes, in the hope of one day buying his freedom. Even had he succeeded, we know he would never have felt free, never have been happy, never have thrown off the yoke of boredom. From the recklessness of youth he swerved to the cautiousness of old age. He was so utterly the outcast, the rebel, the accursed one, that nothing could save him.

I stress this aspect of his nature because it explains many of the malodorous traits attributed to him. He was not a miser, not a peasant at heart, as some of his biographers imply. He was not hard on others, he was hard with himself. Actually he had a generous nature. "His charity was lavish, unobtrusive and discreet," says his old employer, Bardey. "It is probably one of the few things he did without disgust and without a sneer of contempt."

There was one other bogey which obsessed him all his days and nights: military service. From the time he begins his wandering up until the day of his death he is tormented by the fear that he is not *en règle* with the military authorities. Just a few months before his death, while in the hospital at Marseilles, his leg amputated, his sufferings multiplying daily, the fear that the authorities will discover his whereabouts and send him to prison rests like an incubus upon him. "*La prison après ce que je viens de souffrir? Il vaudrait mieux la mort!*" He begs his sister to write him only when it is absolutely necessary, to address him not as

Arthur Rimbaud but simply Rimbaud, and to post the letters from some neighboring town.

The whole fabric of his character is laid bare in these letters which are practically devoid of any literary quality or charm. We see his tremendous hunger for experience, his insatiable curiosity, his illimitable desires, his courage and tenacity, his self-flagellation, his asceticism, his sobriety, his fears and obsessions, his morbidity, his loneliness, his feeling of ostracism, and his unfathomable boredom. We see above all, that like most creative individuals, he was incapable of learning from experience. There is nothing but a repetitious round of similar trials and torments. We see him victimized by the illusion that freedom can be obtained by external means. We see him remaining the adolescent all his life, refusing to accept suffering or give it meaning. To estimate how great was the failure of the latter half of his life we have only to compare his journeying with that of Cabeza de Vaca.*

* * *

But let us leave him in the midst of that desert which he created for himself. My purpose is to indicate certain affinities, analogies, correspondences and repercussions. Let us begin with the parents. Like Madame Rimbaud, my mother was the Northern type, cold, critical, proud, unforgiving, and puritanical. My father was of the South, of Bavarian parents, while Rimbaud's father was Burgundian. There was a continual strife and clash between mother and father, with the usual repercussions upon the offspring. The rebellious nature, so difficult to overcome, here finds its matrix. Like Rimbaud, I too began at an early age to cry: "Death to God!" It was death to everything which the parents endorsed or approved of. It extended even to their friends whom I openly insulted in their presence, even as a stripling. The antagonism never ceased until my father was virtually at the point of death, when at last I began to see how much I resembled him.

Like Rimbaud I hated the place I was born in. I will hate it till my dying day. My earliest impulse is to break loose from the home, from the city I detest, from the country and its citizens with whom I feel nothing in common. Like him too, I am precocious, reciting verses in a foreign language while still in my high-chair. I learned to walk much ahead of time and to speak

* See *The Power Within Us* by Haniel Long; Duell, Sloan & Pearce, New York.

ahead of time, to read the newspaper even before I went to kindergarten. I was always the youngest in the class and not only the best student but the favorite of teachers and comrades alike. But, like him again, I despised the prizes and awards which were made me, and was expelled from school several times for refractory behavior. My whole mission, while at school, seemed to be to make fun of the teachers and the curriculum. It was all too easy and too stupid for me. I felt like a trained monkey.

From earliest childhood I was a voracious reader. For Christmas I requested only books, twenty and thirty at a time. Until I was twenty-five or so I almost never left the house without one or more books under my arm. I read standing up, while going to work, often memorizing long passages of poetry from my favorite authors. One of these was Goethe's *Faust*, I remember. The chief result of this continuous absorption in books was to inflame me to further revolt, to stimulate the latent desire for travel and adventure, to make me anti-literary. It made me contemptuous of everything that surrounded me, alienating me gradually from my friends and imposing on me that solitary, eccentric nature which causes one to be styled a "bizarre" individual. From the age of eighteen (the year of Rimbaud's crisis) I became definitely unhappy, wretched, miserable, despondent. Nothing less than a complete change of environment seemed capable of dissipating this unchanging mood. At twenty-one I broke away, but not for long. Again, like Rimbaud, the opening flights were always disastrous. I was always returning home, either voluntarily or involuntarily, and always in a state of desperation. There seemed no egress, no way of achieving liberation. I undertook the most senseless labors, everything, in short, which I was unfitted for. Like Rimbaud in the quarries at Cyprus, I began with pick and shovel, a day laborer, a migratory worker, a vagabond. There was even this similarity, that when I broke from home it was with the intention of leading an outdoor life, of never again reading a book, of making a living with my two hands, of being a man of the open spaces and not a citizen of a town or city.

All the while, however, my language and my ideas betrayed me. I was completely the literary man, whether I wanted to be or not. Though I could get along with most any type of individual, especially the common man, in the end I was always suspect. It was very much like my visits to the library; always demanding the wrong book. No matter how large the library, the book I wanted was never in or else it was forbidden me. It seemed in those days that everything I wanted in life, or of life, was proscribed. Naturally, I was guilty of the most violent recrimina-

tions. My language, which had been shocking even as a child—I remember being dragged to the police station at the age of six for using foul language—my language, I say, became even more shocking and indecent.

What a jolt I got when I read that Rimbaud, as a young man, used to sign his letters—"that heartless wretch, Rimbaud." Heartless was an adjective I was fond of hearing applied to myself. I had no principles, no loyalty, no code whatsoever; when it suited me, I could be thoroughly unscrupulous, with friend and foe alike. I usually repaid kindness with insult and injury. I was insolent, arrogant, intolerant, violently prejudiced, relentlessly obstinate. In short, I had a distinctly disagreeable personality, a most difficult one to deal with. Yet I was very much liked; people seemed over-eager to forgive my bad qualities for the charm and enthusiasm I dispensed. This attitude served only to embolden me to take further liberties. Sometimes I myself wondered how on earth I could get away with it. The people I most loved to insult and injure were those who deemed themselves my superior in one way or another. Towards these I waged a relentless war. Beneath it all I was what you would call a good boy. My natural temperament was that of a kind, joyous, open-hearted individual. As a youngster I was often referred to as "an angel." But the demon of revolt had taken possession of me at a very early age. It was my mother who implanted it in me. It was against her, against all that she represented, that I directed my uncontrollable energy. Never until I was fifty did I once think of her with affection. Though she never actually balked me (only because my will was the stronger), I felt her shadow across my path constantly. It was a shadow of disapproval, silent and insidious, like a poison slowly injected into the veins.

I was amazed when I read that Rimbaud had allowed his mother to read the manuscript of *A Season in Hell*. Never did I dream of showing my parents anything I had written, or even discussing the subject of my writing with them. When I first informed them that I had decided to become a writer they were horrified; it was as though I had announced that I was going to become a criminal. Why couldn't I do something sensible, something that would enable me to gain a living? Never did they read a line of what I have written. It was a sort of standing joke when their friends inquired of me, when they asked what I was doing. "What is he doing? Oh, he's writing. . . ." As though to say, he's crazy, he's making mud-pies all day long.

I have always pictured the boy Rimbaud as being dolled up like a sissy, and later when a young man, as a dandy. That at any

rate, was my case. My father being a tailor, it was natural for my parents to concentrate on my attire. When I grew up I inherited my father's rather elegant and sumptuous wardrobe. We were exactly the same size. But, like Rimbaud again, during the period when my individuality was asserting itself strenuously, I got myself up grotesquely, matching the inner eccentricities with the outer. I too was an object of ridicule in my own neighborhood. About this time I remember feeling extremely awkward, unsure of myself, and especially timid in conversation with men of any culture. "I don't know how to talk!" exclaimed Rimbaud in Paris when surrounded by other men of letters. Yet who could talk better than he when unrestrained? Even in Africa it was remarked of him how enchantingly he spoke at times. How well I understand this dilemma! What painful memories I have of stammering and stuttering in the presence of the men with whom I longed to hold conversation! With a nobody, on the other hand, I could talk with the tongues of angels. From childhood I was in love with the sound of words, with their magic, their power of enchantment. Often I went on verbal jags, so to speak. I could invent by the hour, driving my listeners to the point of hysteria. It was this quality, incidentally, which I recognized in Rimbaud the instant I glanced at a page of his. It registered like a shot. In Beverly Glen, when I was steeped in his life, I chalked up his phrases on the wall—in the kitchen, in the living room, in the toilet, even outside the house. Those phrases will never lose their potency for me. Each time I run across them I get the same thrill, the same jubilation, the same fear of losing my mind should I dwell on them too long. How many writers are there who can do this to you? Every writer produces some haunting passages, some memorable phrases, but with Rimbaud they are countless, they are strewn all over the pages, like gems tumbled from a rifled chest. It is this endowment which makes the link with Rimbaud indissoluble. And it is only this which I envy him for. Today, after all I have written, my deepest desire is to be done with the books I have projected and give myself up to the creation of sheer nonsense, sheer fantasy. I shall never be the poet he is, but there are vast imaginative reaches still to be attained.

And now we come to "the girl with the violet eyes." We know almost nothing about her. We know only that it was his first tragic experience of love. I do not know if it was in connection with her or the manufacturer's daughter that he used the words—"as scared as 36,000,000 newborn poodle dogs." But I can well believe that such must have been his reaction to the object of his affection. In any case I know that it was mine, and

that she too had violet eyes. It is probable also, that like Rimbaud, I will think of her again on my dying bed. Everything is colored by that first disastrous experience. The strangest thing about it, I must add, is that it was not she who rejected me . . . it was I that held her in such awe and reverence that I fled from her. I imagine it must have been much the same in Rimbaud's case. With him, of course, everything—up to the eighteenth year—was packed into an incredibly short space of time. Just as he ran through the whole gamut of literature in a few years, so he ran through the course of ordinary experience quickly and briefly. He had but to taste a thing to know all that it promised or contained. And so his love life, so far as woman is concerned, was of cursory duration. We hear no mention of love again until Abyssinia, when he takes a native woman as a mistress. It is hardly love, one feels. If anything, his love was directed towards his Harari boy, Djami, to whom he tried to leave a legacy. It is hardly probable, knowing the life he led, that Rimbaud could have loved again with a whole heart.

Verlaine is reputed to have said of Rimbaud that he never gave himself, either to God or to man. How true this may be each one has to judge for himself. To me it seems that nobody could have desired to give himself more than Rimbaud did. As a boy he gave himself to God, as a young man he gave himself to the world. In both instances he felt that he had been deceived and betrayed; he recoiled, especially after his experience of the bloody Commune, and thereafter the core of his being remains intact, unyielding, inaccessible. In this respect he reminds me much of D. H. Lawrence, who had quite a little to say about this subject, i. e., about preserving intact the core of one's being.

It was from the moment he began to earn a living that his real difficulties set in. All his talents, and he possessed many, seemed of no use. Despite all reversals, he pushes on. "Advance, advance always!" His energy is boundless, his will indomitable, his hunger insatiable. "Let the poet burst with his straining after unheard of and unnameable things!" When I think of this period, marked by an almost frantic effort to make an entry into the world, to gain a toehold, when I think of the repeated sallies in this direction and that, like a beleaguered army trying to burst out of the grip in which it is held like a vise, I see my youthful self all over again. Thrice in his teens he reaches Brussels and Paris; twice he reaches London. From Stuttgart, after he has mastered sufficient German, he wanders on foot across Würtemberg and Switzerland into Italy. From Milan he sets out on foot for the Cyclades, via Brindisi, only to suffer a sunstroke and be

returned to Marseilles via Leghorn. He covers the Scandinavian peninsula and Denmark with a traveling carnival; he ships from Hamburg, Antwerp, Rotterdam; he gets to Java by joining the Dutch army, only to desert after a taste of it. Passing St. Helena once in an English vessel which refuses to stop there, he jumps overboard but is brought back before he can reach the island. From Vienna he is escorted to the Bavarian border by the police, as a vagabond; from there he is brought under another escort to the Lorraine border. In all these flights and sallies he is always without money, always walking, and walking usually on an empty stomach. At Civita Vecchia he is set ashore with gastric fever brought on by inflammation of the walls of the stomach caused by the friction of his ribs against his abdomen. Excessive walking. In Abyssinia it is excessive horseback riding. Everything to excess. He drives himself inhumanly. The goal is always beyond.

How well I understand his mania! Looking back upon my life in America, it seems to me that I covered thousands and thousands of miles on an empty stomach. Always looking for a few pennies, for a crust of bread, for a job, for a place to flop. Always looking for a friendly face! At times, even though I was hungry, I would take to the road, hail a passing car and let the driver deposit me where he liked, just to get a change of scene. I know thousands of restaurants in New York, not from visiting them as a patron but from standing outside and gazing wistfully at the diners seated at the tables inside. I can still recall the odor of certain stands on street corners where hot dogs were being served. I can still see the white-robed chefs in the windows flipping waffles or flap-jacks into the pan. Sometimes I think I was born hungry. And with the hunger is associated the walking, the tramping, the searching, the feverish, aimless to and fro. If I succeeded in begging a little more than was necessary for a meal I went immediately to the theatre or to a movie. All I cared for, once my stomach was filled, was to find a warm, cozy place where I could relax and forget my troubles for an hour or two. I would never save enough for carfare in those circumstances; leaving the womb-like warmth of the theatre, I would set out in cold or rain to walk to the remote place where I happened to live. From the heart of Brooklyn to the heart of Manhattan I have walked countless times, in all kinds of weather and in varying degrees of starvation. When utterly exhausted, when unable to move another step, I have been obliged to turn round and retrace my steps. I understand perfectly how men can be trained to make forced marches of phenomenal length on empty bellies.

But it is one thing to walk the streets of your native city amidst hostile faces and quite another to tramp the highway in neighboring states. In your home town the hostility is merely indifference; in a strange town, or in the open stretches between towns, it is a distinctly antagonistic element that greets you. There are savage dogs, shot guns, sheriffs and vigilantes of all sorts lying in wait for you. You dare not lie down on the cold earth if you are a stranger in that vicinity. You keep moving, moving, moving all the time. In your back you feel the cold muzzle of a revolver, bidding you to move faster, faster, faster. This is your own country, too, in which all this happens, not a foreign land. The Japs may be cruel, the Huns barbarous, but what devils are these who look like you and talk like you, who wear the same dress, eat the same food, and who hound you like dogs? Are these not the worst enemies a man can have? The others I can find excuses for, but for one's own kind I can find no excuse whatever. "I have no friends there," Rimbaud often wrote home. Even in June, 1891, from the hospital in Marseilles, he repeats this refrain. "*Je mourrai où me jettera le destin. J'espère pouvoir retourner là où j'étais (Abysinnie), j'y ai des amis de dix ans, qui auront pitié de moi, je trouverai chez eux du travail, je vivrai comme je pourrai. Je vivrai toujours là-bas, tandis qu'en France, hors vous, je n'ai ni amis, ni connaissances, ni personne.*" Here a footnote reads: "*Cependant la gloire littéraire de Rimbaud battait alors son plein à Paris. Les admirateurs, qui lui eussent été personnellement tout dévoués, étaient déjà nombreux. Il l'ignorait. Quelle malédiction!*"

Yes, what a malediction! I think of my own return to New York, an enforced return also, after ten years abroad. I had left America with ten dollars which I borrowed at the last moment before catching the boat; I returned without a cent, borrowing the money for the cab-man from the hotel clerk who, seeing my trunk and valises, assumed I would have the money to pay for my hotel bill. The first thing I have to do, on arriving "home," is to telephone some one for a little money. Unlike Rimbaud, I have no belt full of gold hidden under the bed; but I still have two good legs, and in the morning, if help does not arrive during the night, I shall begin walking uptown in search of a friendly face again. In those ten years abroad I too had worked like a demon; I had earned the right to live comfortably for a year or so. But the war intervened, smashed everything, just as the intrigues of the European powers had blighted Rimbaud's chances in Somaliland. How familiar sounds a passage from a letter dated Aden, January 1888 . . . "*Tous les gouvernements sont venus en-*

gloutir des millions (et même en somme quelques milliards) sur toutes ces côtes maudites, désolées, où les indigènes errent des mois sans vivre et sans eau, sous le climat le plus effroyable du globe; et tous ces millions qu'on a jetés dans le ventre des bédouins n'ont rien rapporté que les guerres, les désastres de tous genres!"

What a faithful picture this is of our dear governments! Always seeking to gain a foothold in some ungodly place, always suppressing or exterminating the natives, always clinging to their ill-gotten gains, defending their possessions, their colonies, with army and navy. For the biggest ones the world is not big enough. For the little ones who need room, pious words and veiled threats. The earth belongs to the strong, to those with the biggest armies and navies, to those who wield the economic big stick. How ironical that the solitary poet who ran to the end of the world in order to eke out a miserable living should have to sit with hands folded and watch the big powers make a mess of things in his own garden.

"Yes, the end of the world... Advance, advance always! Now begins the great adventure . . ." But as fast as you advance, the government is there ahead of you, with restrictions, with shackles and manacles, with poison gases, tanks and stink bombs. Rimbaud the poet sets himself to teaching the Harari boys and girls the Koran in their own language. The governments would sell them in slavery. "There is some destruction that is necessary," he wrote once, and what a fuss has been made over that simple statement! He was speaking then of the destruction incidental to creation. But governments destroy without the slightest excuse, and certainly with never a thought of creation. What Rimbaud the poet desired was to see the old forms go, in life as well as in literature. What governments desire is to preserve the status quo, no matter how much slaughter and destruction it entails. Some of his biographers, in describing his behavior as a youth, make him out to be a very bad boy; he did such nasty things, don't you know. But when it comes to appraising the activities of their dear governments, particularly with regard to those shady intrigues which Rimbaud inveighed against, they are all honey and whitewash. When they want to castigate him as the adventurer, they speak of what a great poet he was; when they want to subjugate him as a poet they speak of his chaos and rebelliousness. They are aghast when the poet imitates their plunderers and exploiters, and they are horrified when he shows no concern for money or for the monotonous, irksome life of the ordinary citizen. As a Bohemian he is too Bohemian, as a

poet too poetical, as a pioneer too pioneering, as a man of affairs too much the man of affairs, as a gun-runner too clever a gun-runner, and so on and so forth. Whatever he did, he did too well, that seems to be the complaint against him. The pity is that he didn't become a politician. He would have done the job so well that Hitler, Stalin and Mussolini, to say nothing of Churchill and Roosevelt, would seem like mountebanks today. I don't think he would have brought about quite the destruction which these estimable leaders visited upon the world. He would have kept something up his sleeve for a rainy day, so to speak. He would not have shot his bolt. He would not have lost track of the goal, as our brilliant leaders seem to have done. No matter what a fiasco he made of his own life, oddly enough I believe that if he had been given the chance he would have made the world a better place to live in. I believe that the dreamer, no matter how impractical he may appear to the man in the street, is a thousand times more capable, more efficient, than the so-called statesman. All those incredible projects which Rimbaud envisaged putting into effect, and which were frustrated for one reason or another, have since been realized in some degree. He thought of them too soon, that was all. He saw far beyond the hopes and dreams of ordinary men and statesmen alike. He lacked the support of those very people who delight in accusing him of being the dreamer, the people who dream only when they fall asleep, never with eyes wide open. For the dreamer who stands in the very midst of reality all proceeds too slowly, too lumberingly—even destruction.

"He will never be satisfied," writes one biographer. "Under his weary glance all flowers fade, all stars pale." Yes, there is a grain of truth in this. I know because I suffer from the same disease. *But*, if one has dreamed an empire, the empire of man, and if one dares to reflect at what a snail's pace men are advancing towards the realization of this dream, it is quite possible that what are called the activities of man pale to insignificance. I don't believe for a minute that the flowers ever faded or the stars were ever dimmed in Rimbaud's eyes. I think that with these the core of his being always maintained a direct and fervid communication. It was in the world of men that his weary glance saw things pale and fade. He began by wanting to "see all, feel all, exhaust everything, explore everything, say everything." It was not long before he felt the bit in his mouth, the spurs in his flanks, the lash on his back. Let a man but dress differently from his fellow creatures and he becomes an object of scorn and ridicule. The only law which is really lived up to whole-heartedly

and with a vengeance is the law of conformity. No wonder that as a mere lad he ended "by finding the disorder of his mind sacred." At this point he had really made himself a seer. He found, however, that he was regarded as a clown and a mountebank. He had the choice of fighting for the rest of his life to hold the ground he had gained or to renounce the struggle utterly. Why could he not have compromised? Because compromise was not in his vocabulary. He was a fanatic from childhood, a person who had to go the whole hog or die. In this lies his purity, his innocence.

In all this I rediscover my own plight. I have never relinquished the struggle. But what a price I have paid! I have had to wage guerilla warfare, that hopeless struggle which is born only of desperation. The work I set out to write has not yet been written, or only partially. Just to raise my voice, to speak in my own fashion, I have had to fight every inch of the way. The song has almost been forgotten for the fight. Talk of the weary glance under which flowers fade and stars pale! My glance has become positively corrosive: it is only a miracle that under my pitiless gaze they are not blasted away. So much for the core of my being. As for the superficies, well, the outward man has gradually learned to accomodate himself to the ways of the world. He can be in it without being of it. He can be kind, gentle, charitable, hospitable. Why not? "The real problem," as Rimbaud pointed out, "is to make the soul monstrous." That is to say, not hideous but prodigious! What is the meaning of monstrous? According to the dictionary, "any organized form of life greatly malformed either by the lack, excess, misplacement or distortion of parts or organs; hence, anything hideous or abnormal, or made up of inconsistent parts or characters, whether repulsive or not." The root is from the Latin verb *moneo*, to warn. In mythology we recognize the monstrous under the form of the harpy, the gorgon, the sphinx, the centaur, the dryad, the mermaid. They are all prodigies, which is the essential meaning of the word. They have upset the norm, the balance. What does this signify if not the fear of the little man. Timid souls always see monsters in their path, whether these be called hippogriffs or Hitlerians. Man's greatest dread is the expansion of consciousness. All the fearsome, gruesome part of mythology stems from this fear. "Let us live in peace and harmony!" begs the little man. But the law of the universe dictates that peace and harmony can only be won by inner struggle. The little man does not want to pay the price for that kind of peace and harmony; he wants it ready-made, like a suit of manufactured clothes.

* * *

There are obsessive, repetitive words which a writer uses which are more revealing than all the facts which are amassed by patient biographers. Here are a few that we come across in Rimbaud's work: *éternité, infini, charité, solitude, angoisse, lumière, aube, soleil, amour, beauté, inoui, pitié, démon, ange, ivresse, paradis, enfer, ennui*. . .

These are the warp and woof of his inner pattern; they tell us of his innocence, his hunger, his restlessness, his fanaticism, his intolerance, his absolutism. His god was Baudelaire who had plumbed the depths of evil. I have remarked earlier, and it is worth repeating, that the whole nineteenth century was tormented with the question of God. Outwardly it seems like a century given up to material progress, a century of discoveries and inventions, all pertaining to the physical world. At the core, however, where the artists and thinkers are always anchored, we observe a profound disturbance. Rimbaud epitomizes the conflict in a few pages. And, as if that were not enough, he impresses on his whole life the same enigmatic cast which characterizes the epoch. He is more truly the man of his time than were Goethe, Shelley, Blake, Nietzsche, Hegel, Marx, Dostoevski. He is split from top to toe in every realm of his being. He faces two ways always. He is torn apart, racked by the wheel of time. He is the victim and the executioner: when you speak his name you have the time, the place and the event. Now that we have succeeded in breaking down the atom the cosmos is split wide open. Now we face in every direction at once. We have arrived, possessed of a power which even the gods of old could not wield. We are there, before the gates of hell. Will we storm the gates, burst hell itself wide open? I believe we will. I think that the task of the future is to explore the domain of evil until not a shred of mystery is left. We shall discover the bitter roots of beauty, accept root and flower, leaf and bud. We can no longer resist evil: we must accept.

When he was writing his "nigger book" (*Une Saison en Enfer*), Rimbaud is said to have declared: "My fate depends on this book!" How profoundly true that statement was not even Rimbaud himself knew. As we begin to realize our own tragic fate, we begin to perceive what he meant. He had identified his fate with that of the most crucial epoch known to man. Either, like him, we are going to renounce all that our civilization has stood for thus far, and attempt to build afresh, or we are going to destroy it with our own hands. When the poet stands at nadir the world must indeed be upside down. If the poet can no longer speak for society, but only for himself, then we are at the last

ditch. On the poetic corpse of Rimbaud we have begun erecting a tower of Babel. It means nothing that we still have poets, or that some of them are still intelligible, still able to communicate with the mob. What is the trend of poetry and where is the link between poet and audience? *What is the message?* Let us ask that above all. Whose voice is it that now makes itself heard, the poet's or the scientist's? Are we thinking of Beauty, however bitter, or are we thinking of atomic energy? And what is the chief emotion which our great discoveries now inspire? Dread! We have knowledge without wisdom, comfort without security, belief without faith. The poetry of life is expressed only in terms of the mathematical, the physical, the chemical. The poet is a pariah, an anomaly. He is on the way to extinction. Who cares now how *monstrous* he makes himself? The monster is at large, roaming the world. He has escaped from the laboratory; he is at the service of any one who has the courage to employ him. The world has indeed become number. The moral dichotomy, like all dichotomies, has broken down. This is the period of flux and hazard; the great drift has set in.

And fools are talking about reparations, inquisitions, retribution, about alignments and coalitions, about free trade and economic stabilization and rehabilitation. No one believes in his heart that the world situation can be righted. Everyone is waiting for the great event, the only event which preoccupies us night and day: *the next war*. We have unsettled everything; no one knows how or where to reach for the control. The brakes are still there, but will they work? We know they won't. No, the demon has broken loose. The age of electricity is as far behind us as the Stone Age. This is the Age of Power, power pure and simple. Now it is either heaven or hell, no in between is possible any longer. And by all indications we will choose hell. When the poet lives his hell, it is no longer possible for the common man to escape it. Did I call Rimbaud a renegade? *We are all renegades*. We have been reneging since the dawn of time. Fate at last is catching up with us. We are going to have our Season in Hell, every man, woman and child identified with this civilization. This is what we have been begging for, and now it is here. Aden will seem like a comfortable place. In Rimbaud's time it was still possible to leave Aden for Harar, but fifty years from now the earth itself will be one vast crater. Despite the denials of the men of science, the power we now have in our hands is radio-active, is permanently destructive. We have never thought of power in terms of good, only in terms of evil. There is nothing mysterious about the energies of the atom; the mystery is in

men's hearts. The discovery of atomic energy is synchronous with the discovery that we can never trust one another again. There lies the fatality—in this hydra-headed fear which no bomb can destroy. The real renegade is the man who has lost faith in his fellowman. Today the loss of faith is universal. Here God himself is powerless. We have put our faith in the bomb, and it is the bomb which will answer our prayers.

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What a shock it is for the poet to discover that Rimbaud renounced his calling! It is like saying that he renounced Love. Whatever the motive, certainly the paramount drive was loss of faith. The consternation of the poet, his feeling of betrayal and deception, is paralleled by the reaction of the scientist when he discovers the use to which his inventions are put. One is tempted to compare Rimbaud's act of renunciation with the release of the atomic bomb. The repercussions, though more wide-spread in the latter case, are not more profound. The heart registers a shock before the rest of the body. It takes time for doom to spread throughout the corpus of civilization. But when Rimbaud walked out the back door, doom had already announced itself.

How right I was to put off the true discovery of Rimbaud! If I draw entirely different conclusions from other poets about his appearance and manifestations on earth, it is in the same spirit that the saints drew extraordinary conclusions about the coming of Christ. Either such things are signal events in the history of man or the art of interpretation is a bogus one. That we shall all live one day as did Christ I have not the slightest doubt. That we shall all deny our individuality first, I have no doubt about either. We have reached the ultimate point of egotism, the atomic state of being. There we go to smash. We are preparing now for the death of the little self in order that the real self may emerge. Unwittingly and unconsciously we have made the world one, but one in nullity. We must go through a collective death in order to emerge as genuine individuals. If it is true, as Lautréamont said, that "poetry must be made by all," then we must find a new language in which one heart will speak to another without intermediation. Our appeal to one another must be as direct and instantaneous as is the man of God's to God. The poet today is obliged to surrender his calling because he has already evinced his despair, because he has already acknowledged his inability to communicate. To be a poet was once the highest calling; today it is the most futile one. It is so not

because the world is immune to the poet's pleading, but because the poet himself no longer believes in his divine mission. He has been singing off-key now for a century or more; at last we can no longer tune in. The screech of the bomb still makes sense to us, but the ravings of the poet seem like gibberish. And it is gibberish if, out of two billion people who make up the world, only a few thousand pretend to understand what the individual poet is saying. The cult of art reaches its end when it exists only for a precious handful of men and women. Then it is no longer art but the cipher language of a secret society for the propagation of meaningless individuality. Art is something which stirs men's passions, which gives vision, lucidity, courage and faith. Has any artist in words of recent years stirred the world as did Hitler? Has any poem shocked the world as did the atomic bomb recently? Not since the coming of Christ have we seen such vistas unfolding, multiplying daily. What weapons has the poet compared to these? *Or what dreams?* Where now is his vaunted imagination? Reality is here before our very eyes, stark naked, but where is the song to announce it? Is there a poet of even the fifth magnitude visible? I see none. I do not call poets those who make verses, rhymed or unrhymed. I call that man poet who is capable of profoundly altering the world. If there be such a poet living in our midst, let him declare himself. Let him raise his voice! But it will have to be a voice which can drown the roar of the bomb. He will have to use a language which melts men's hearts, which makes the blood bubble.

If the mission of poetry is to awaken, we ought to have been awakened long ago. Some have been awakened, there is no denying that. But now *all* men have to be awakened—and immediately—or we perish. But man will never perish, depend on that. It is a culture, a civilization, a way of life which will perish. When these dead awaken, as they will, poetry will be the very stuff of life. We can afford to lose the poet if we are to preserve poetry itself. It does not require paper and ink to create poetry or to disseminate it. Primitive peoples on the whole are poets of action, poets of life. They are still making poetry, though it moves us not. Were we alive to the poetic, we would not be immune to their way of life: we would have incorporated their poetry in ours, we would have infused our lives with the beauty which permeates theirs. The poetry of the civilized man has always been exclusive, esoteric. It has brought about its own demise.

"We must be absolutely modern," said Rimbaud, meaning that chimeras are out of date, and superstitions and fetiches and creeds and dogmas and all the cherished drivel and inanity of

which our vaunted civilization is composed. We must bring light, not artificial illumination. "Money is depreciating everywhere," he wrote in one of his letters. That was back in the '80's. Today in Europe it has practically no value whatever. What men want is food, shelter, clothing—basic things—not money. The rotten edifice has crumbled before our very eyes, but we are reluctant to believe our eyes. We still hope to be able to do business as usual. We neither realize the damage that has been done nor the possibilities of re-birth. We are using the language of the Old Stone Age. If men cannot grasp the enormity of the present how will they ever be able to think in terms of the future? We have been thinking in terms of the past for several thousand years. Now, at one stroke, that whole mysterious past has been obliterated. There is only the future staring us in the face. It yawns like a gulf. It is terrifying, everyone concedes, even to begin to think what the future holds in store for us. Far more terrifying than the past ever was. In the past the monsters were of human proportions; one could cope with them, if one were heroic enough. Now the monster is invisible; there are billions of them in a grain of dust. I am still using the language of the Old Stone Age, you will notice. I speak as though the atom itself were the monster, as though it exercised the power and not us. This is the sort of deception we have practised on ourselves ever since man began to think. And this, too, is a delusion—to pretend that at some distant point in the past man *began to think*. Man has not even begun to think. Mentally, he is still on all fours. He is groping about in the mist, his eyes closed, his heart hammering with fear. And what he fears most—God pity him!—is his own image.

If a single atom contains so much energy, what about man himself in whom there are universes of atoms? If it is energy he worships, why does he not look at himself? If he can conceive, and demonstrate to his own satisfaction, the boundless energy imprisoned in an infinitesimal atom, what then of those Niagaras within him? And what of the earth's energy, to speak of but another infinitesimal conglomeration of matter? If we are looking for demons to harness, then there is such an infinitude of them that the thought is paralyzing. Or—it is so exalting that men should be running breathlessly from door to door spreading delirium and pandemonium. Only now perhaps can one possibly appreciate the fervor which was Satan's when he unleashed the forces of evil. Historical man has known nothing of the truly demonic. He has inhabited a shadow world filled with faint reverberations only. The issue between good and evil was decided long ago. Evil belongs to the phantom world, the world of make

believe. Death to the chimeras! Aye, but they *were* slain long ago. Man was given second sight that he might see through and beyond the world of phantasmagoria. The only effort demanded of him is that he open the eyes of his soul, that he gaze into the heart of reality and not flounder about in the realm of illusion and delusion.

* * *

There is one subtle change I feel compelled to make, in connection with the interpretation of Rimbaud's life, and this concerns the element of fate. It was his destiny to be the electrifying poet of our age, the symbol of the disruptive forces which are now making themselves manifest. It was his *fate*, I used to think, to be ensnared into a life of action in which he would end ingloriously. When he said that his fate depended on the "*Saison*," he meant, I assume, that it would decide the course of his future actions, and, as now seems clear, it most certainly did. We may think, if we like, that in writing it he stood so clearly revealed to himself that he no longer had need for expression on the level of art. As poet he had said all he possibly could say. We imagine that he was aware of this and consequently turned his back on art deliberately. Some men have referred to the second half of his life as a sort of Rip Van Winkle sleep; it is not the first time that an artist has gone to sleep on the world. Paul Valéry, who leaps to mind immediately, did something of the sort when he deserted the realm of poetry for mathematics for a period of twenty years or so. Usually there has been a return, or an awakening. In Rimbaud's case the awakening was in death. The little light which flickered out with his demise grew in power and intensity as the fact of his death became more largely known. He has lived more wondrously and vividly since he departed this earth than he ever did in life. One wonders, had he come back *in this life*, what sort of poetry he would have written, what his message would have been. It was as though, cut off in the prime of manhood, he was cheated of that final phase of development which permits a man to harmonize his warring selves. Operating under a curse for the major part of his life, fighting with all his powers to find egress into the clear, open spaces of his being, he is beaten to earth for the last time just when one feels that the clouds were lifting. The feverishness of his activity bespeaks the consciousness of a short life, as in the case of D. H. Lawrence and others. If one asks whether such men realized themselves to the fullest one is inclined to reply in the affirmative. Yet they were not permitted to run full cycle; if we are to be fair to them,

this unlived future must be taken into consideration. I have said it of Lawrence, and I will say it of Rimbaud, that had they been granted another thirty years of life, they would have sung a different tune entirely. They were at one with their destiny always; it was their fate which betrayed them and which is apt to deceive us in examining their deeds and motives.

Rimbaud, as I see him, was *par excellence* an evolving type. The evolution he went through in the first half of his life is no more amazing than the evolution of the second half. It is we, perhaps, who are unaware of the glorious phase he was preparing to enter. He sinks below our horizon on the eve of another great change, at the beginning of a fruitful period when the poet and the man of action were about to fuse. We see him expiring as a defeated man; we have no perception of the rewards which his years of worldly experience were storing up for him. We see two opposite types of being united in one man; we see the conflict but not the potential harmony or resolution. Only those who are interested in the *significance* of his life will permit themselves to dally with such speculations. Yet the only purpose in going to the life of a great personality, of studying it in conjunction with his work, is to bring forth what is hidden and obscure, what was uncompleted, as it were. To speak of the real Lawrence or the real Rimbaud is to make cognizant the fact that there is an *unknown* Lawrence, an *unknown* Rimbaud. There would be no controversy about such figures had they been able to reveal themselves utterly. It is curious to note in this connection that it is precisely the men who deal in revelations—*self-revelations*—about whom there is the greatest mystery. Such individuals seem to be born into the world struggling to express what is most secret in their nature. That there is a secret which gnaws them is hardly a matter of doubt. One need not be "occult" to be aware of the difference between their problems and other eminent men's, as well as their approach to these problems. These men are deeply allied to the spirit of the times, to those underlying problems which beset the age and give it its character and tone. They are always dual, apparently, and for a good reason, since they incarnate the old and the new together. It is for this reason that more time, more detachment, is required to appreciate and evaluate them than their contemporaries however illustrious. These men have their roots in that very future which disturbs us so profoundly. They have two rhythms, two faces, two interpretations. They are integrated to transition, to flux. Wise in a new way, their language seems cryptic to us, if not foolish or contradictory.

In one of the poems Rimbaud makes mention of that gnawing secret I refer to:

*"Hydre intime, sans gueules,
Qui mine et désole."*

It was an affliction which poisoned him both at the zenith and the nadir of his being. In him sun and moon were both strong, and both eclipsed. (*"Toute lune est atroce et tout soleil amer."*) The very core of his being was corroded; it spread, like the cancer which attacked his knee. His life as a poet, which was the lunar phase of his evolution, reveals the same quality of eclipse as his later life of adventurer and man of action, which was the solar phase. Narrowly escaping madness in his youth, he escaped it once again upon his death. The only solution possible for him, had he not been cut off by death, was the contemplative life, the mystic way. It is my belief that his thirty-seven years were a preparation for such a way of life.

Why do I permit myself to speak of this unfinished part of his life with such certitude? Because once again I see analogies to my own life, my own development. Had I died at the age Rimbaud died, what would be known of my purpose, my efforts? Nothing. I would have been regarded as a rank failure. I have had to wait until my forty-third year to see my first book published. It is a fateful event for me, comparable in every way to the publication of the *"Saison."* With its advent a long cycle of frustration and defeat comes to an end. For me it might also be styled "my nigger book." It is the last word in despair, revolt and malediction. It is also prophetic and healing, not only for my readers but for me too. It has that saving quality of art which so often distinguishes those books which break with the past. It enabled me to close the door on the past and re-enter it by the back door. The gnawing secret continues to eat me away, but now it is "the open secret," and I can cope with it.

And what is the nature of this secret? I can only say that it has to do with the mothers. I feel that it was the same with Lawrence and with Rimbaud. All the rebelliousness which I share with them derives from this problem which, as nearly as I can express it, means the search for one's true link with humanity. One finds it neither in the personal life nor in the collective life, if one is of this type. One is unadaptable to the point of madness. One longs to find his peer, but one is surrounded by vast empty spaces. One needs a teacher, but one lacks the humility, the flexibility, the patience which is demanded. One is not even at home or at ease with the great in spirit; even the highest are defective or suspect. And yet one has affinities only with these

highest types. It is a dilemma of the first magnitude, a dilemma fraught with the highest significance. One has to establish the ultimate difference of his own peculiar being and doing so discover his kinship with all humanity, even the very lowest. Acceptance is the key word. But acceptance is precisely the great stumbling block. It has to be total acceptance and not conformity.

What makes it so difficult for this type to accept the world? The fact, as I see it now, that in early life the whole dark side of life, and of one's own being, of course, had been suppressed, so thoroughly repressed as to be unrecognizable. Not to have rejected this dark side of being would have meant, so one unconsciously reasons with himself, a loss of individuality, loss of freedom even more. Freedom is bound up with differentiation. Salvation here means only the preservation of one's unique identity in a world tending to make every one and every thing alike. This is the root of the fear. Rimbaud stressed the fact that he wanted *liberty* in salvation. But one is saved only by surrendering this illusory freedom. The liberty he demanded was freedom for his ego to assert itself unrestrained. That is not freedom. Under this illusion one can, if one lives long enough, play out every facet of one's being and still find cause to complain, ground to rebel. It is a kind of liberty which grants one the right to object, to secede if necessary. It does not take into account other people's differences, only one's own. It will never aid one to find one's link, one's communion, with all mankind. One remains forever separate, forever isolate.

All this has but one meaning for me—that one is still bound to the mother. All one's rebellion was but dust in the eye, the frantic attempt to conceal this bondage. Men of this stamp are always against their native land—impossible to be otherwise. Enslavement is the great bugaboo, whether it be to country, church or society. Their lives are spent in breaking fetters, but the secret bondage gnaws at their vitals and gives them no rest. They must come to terms with the mother before they can rid themselves of the obsession of fetters. "Outside! Forever outside! Sitting on the door-step of the mother's womb." I believe those are my own words, in *Black Spring*, a golden period when I was almost in possession of the secret. No wonder one is alienated from the mother. One does not notice her, except as an obstacle. One wants the comfort and security of her womb, that darkness and ease which for the unborn is the equivalent of illumination and acceptance for the truly born. Society is made up of closed doors, of taboos, laws, repressions and suppressions. One has no way of getting to grips with those elements which make up soci-

ety and through which one must work if one is ever to establish a true society. It is a perpetual dance on the edge of the crater. One may be acclaimed as a great rebel, but one will never be loved. And for the rebel above all men it is necessary to know love, to give it even more than to receive it, and to be it even more than to give it.

Once I wrote an essay called "The Enormous Womb." In this essay I conceived the world itself as a womb, as the place of creation. This was a valiant and a valid effort towards acceptance. It was a harbinger of a more genuine acceptance which was shortly to follow, an acceptance which I realized with my whole being. But this attitude, of regarding the world itself as womb and creation, was not a pleasant one to other rebels. It only alienated me still more. When the rebel falls out with the rebel, as he usually does, it is like the ground giving way beneath one's feet. Rimbaud experienced that sinking feeling during the Commune. The professional rebel finds it difficult to swallow such an attitude. He has an ugly name for it: treason. But it is just this treasonable nature in the rebel which differentiates him from the herd. He is treasonable and sacrilegious always, if not in the letter then in the spirit. He is a traitor at heart because he fears the humanity in him which would unite him with his fellow man; he is an iconoclast because, revering the image too greatly, he comes to fear it. What he wants above all is his common humanity, his powers of adoration and reverence. He is sick of standing alone; he does not want to be forever a fish out of water. He cannot live with his ideals unless these ideals are shared, but how can he communicate his ideas and ideals if he does not speak the same language as his fellow-man? How can he win them if he does not know love? How can he persuade them to build if his whole life is spent in destroying?

Upon what foundation is unrest built? The "*hydre intime*" eats away until even the core of one's being becomes sawdust and the whole body, one's own and the world's, is like unto a temple of desolation. "*Rien de rien ne m'illusionne!*" cried Rimbaud. Yet his whole life was nothing but a grand illusion. The true reality of his being he never uncovered, never came to grips with. Reality was the mask which he struggled with fierce claws to rip away. In him was a thirst unquenchable.

*"Legendes ni figures
Ne me désaltèrent."*

No, nothing could quench his thirst. The fever was in his vitals where the secret gnawed and gnawed. His spirit reveals itself from the amniotic depths, where, like a drunken boat he tosses

on the sea of his poems. Wherever the light penetrates it wounds. Each message from the bright world of spirit creates a fissure in the wall of the tomb. He lives in an ancestral refuge which crumbles with exposure to the light of day. With all that was elemental he was at home; he was a throw-back, an archaic figure, more French than any Frenchman yet an alien in their midst. Everything that had been reared in the light of common effort he rejected. His memory, which embraces the time of the Cathedrals, the time of the Crusades, is a race memory. It is almost as though birth had failed to individualize him. He comes into the world equipped like a Saracen. He has another code, another principle of action, another world view. He is a primitive endowed with all the noblesse of ancient lineage. He is super in every way, the better to conceal his minus side. He is that differentiated being, the prodigy, born of human flesh and blood but suckled by the wolves. No analytic jargon will ever explain the monster. We know what he failed to do, but what he should have done, in order to be true to his being, who can say? We have to revise the laws of understanding in order to grapple with such an enigma.

Men are being thrown up now who will force us to alter our methods of perception. That ancient refuge in which Rimbaud lived with his secret is fast crumbling. Every discordant figure will soon be forced into the open; there are no hiding places left any more. In the common plight the bizarre figure with his mysterious malady will be routed from his unique trench. The entire world of men and women is being rounded up, brought before the bars of justice. What matter if some rare spirits were ill at ease, maladjusted, distilling perfume from their sufferings? Now the race as a whole is preparing to suffer the great ordeal. With the great event almost upon us the reading of the glyphs becomes more than ever important, more than ever exciting. Soon, and most abruptly, we shall all be swimming breast to breast, the seer as well as the common man. A world totally new, a world awesome and forbidding, is at our door. We shall awaken one day to look out upon a scene beyond all comprehending. The poets and seers have been announcing that new world for generations, but we have refused to believe them. We of the fixed stars have rejected the message of the wanderers in the sky. We have regarded them as dead planets, as fugitive ghosts, as the survivors of long forgotten catastrophes.

How like the wanderers of the heavens are the poets! Do they not, like the planets, seem to be in communication with other worlds? Do they not tell us of things to come as well as of things long past, buried in the racial memory of man? What

better significance can we give to their fugitive stay on earth than that of emissaries from another world? We live amidst dead facts whereas they live in signs and symbols. Their longings coincide with ours only when we approach perihelion. They are trying to detach us from our moorings; they urge us to fly with them on the wings of the spirit. They are always announcing the advent of things to come and we crucify them because we live in dread of the unknown. In the poet the springs of action are hidden. A more highly evolved type than the rest of the species—and here by “poet” I mean all those who dwell in the spirit and the imagination—he is allowed only the same period of gestation as other men. He has to continue his gestation after birth. The world he will inhabit is not the same as ours; it resembles ours only insofar as our world may be said to resemble that of the Cro-Magnon man. His apprehension of things is similar to that of a man from a fourth-dimensional world living in one of three dimensions. He is in our world but not of it; his allegiance is elsewhere. It is his mission to seduce us, to render intolerable this limited world which bounds us. But only those are capable of following the call who have lived through their three-dimensional world, lived out its possibilities.

The signs and symbols which the poet employs are one of the surest proofs that language is a means of dealing with the unutterable and the inscrutable. As soon as the symbols become communicable on every level they lose their validity and effectiveness. To ask the poet to speak the language of the man in the street is like expecting the prophet to make clear his predictions. That which speaks to us from higher, more distant, realms comes clothed in secrecy and mystery. That which is being constantly expanded and elaborated through explication—in short, the conceptual world—is at the same time being compressed, tightened up, through the use of the stenographic calligraphy of symbols. We can never explain except in terms of new conundrums. What belongs to the realm of spirit, or the eternal, evades all explanation. The language of the poet is asymptotic; it runs parallel to the inner voice when the latter approaches the infinitude of spirit. It is through this inner register that the man without language, so to speak, is in communication with the poet. There is no question of verbal education involved but one of spiritual development. The purity of Rimbaud is nowhere more apparent than in this uncompromising pitch which he maintained throughout his work. He is understood by the most diverse types, as well as misunderstood by the most diverse types. His imitators can be detected immediately. He has nothing in common with the

school of symbolists. Nor has he anything in common with the surrealists, as far as I can see. He is the father of many schools and the parent of none. It is his unique use of the symbol which is the warrant of his genius. This symbology was forged in blood and anguish. It was at once a protest and a circumvention of the dismal spread of knowledge which threatened to stifle the source of the spirit. It was also a window opening upon a world of vastly more complex relations for which the old sign language no longer served. Here he is closer to the mathematician and the scientist than to the poet of our time. Unlike our latter-day poets, be it noted, he did *not* make use of the symbols used by the mathematician and the scientist. His language is the language of the spirit, not of weights, measures and abstract relations. In this alone he revealed how absolutely "modern" he was.

Here I should like to amplify a point I touched on earlier, the matter of communication between poet and audience. In applauding Rimbaud's use of the symbol I mean to emphasize that in this direction lies the true trend of the poet. There is a vast difference, in my mind, between the use of a more symbolic script and the use of a more highly personal jargon which I referred to as "gibberish." The modern poet seems to turn his back on his audience, as if he held it in contempt. In self-defense he will sometimes liken himself to the mathematician or the physicist who has now come to employ a sign language wholly beyond the comprehension of most educated people, an esoteric language understandable only to the members of his own cult. He seems to forget that he has a totally different function than these men who deal with the physical or the abstract world. His medium is the spirit and his relation to the world of men and women is a vital one. His language is not for the laboratory but for the recesses of the heart. If he renounces the power to move us his medium becomes worthless. The place of renewal is the heart, and there the poet must anchor himself. The scientist, on the other hand, is utterly concerned with the world of illusion, the physical world in which things *are made to happen*. He is already a victim of the powers he once hoped to exploit. His day is coming to a close. The poet will never quite find himself in this position. He would not be a poet in the first place if his instinct for life were as perverted as the scientist's. But the danger which menaces him is the abrogation of his powers; by betraying his trust he is surrendering the destinies of countless human beings to the control of worldly individuals whose sole aim is their own personal aggrandisement. The abdication of Rimbaud is of another

calibre from the self-liquidation of the contemporary poet. Rimbaud refused to become something other than he was, in his office as poet, in order to survive. Our poets are jealous of the name but show no disposition to accept the responsibility of their office. They have not *proved* themselves poets; they are content simply to call themselves such. They are writing not for a world which hangs on their every word but for one another. They justify their impotence by deliberately making themselves unintelligible. They are locked in their glorified little egos; they hold themselves aloof from the world for fear of being shattered at the first contact. They are not even personal, when one gets right down to it, for if they were we might understand their torment and delirium, such as it is. They have made themselves as abstract as the problems of the physicist. Theirs is a womb-like yearning for a world of pure poetry in which the effort to communicate is reduced to zero*

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When I think of those other great spirits who were contemporaneous with Rimbaud—men like Nietzsche, Strindberg, Dostoevski—when I think of the anguish they suffered, an ordeal beyond anything our men of genius have had to endure, I begin to think that the latter half of the nineteenth century was one of the most accursed periods in history. Of that band of martyrs, all of them filled with premonitions of the future, the one whose tragedy most closely approaches Rimbaud's is Van Gogh. Born a year ahead of Rimbaud he dies by his own hand at almost the same age. Like Rimbaud, he too had an adamant will, an almost super-human courage, an extraordinary energy and perseverance, all of which enabled him to fight against insuperable odds. But like Rimbaud again, the struggle exhausts him in the prime of life; he is laid low at the height of his powers.

The wanderings, the changes of occupation, the vicissitudes, the frustrations and humiliations, the cloud of unknowingness which surrounded them, all these factors common to both their lives, make them stand out like ill-fated twins. Their lives are among the very saddest we have record of in modern times. No man can read Van Gogh's letters without breaking down time and again. The great difference between them, however, is in the fact that Van Gogh's life inspires. Shortly after Van Gogh's

* See the essay called "An Open Letter to Surrealists Everywhere" in *The Cosmological Eye*, New Directions, New York.

death Dr. Gachet, who understood his patient profoundly, wrote to Vincent's brother Theo: "The word love of art is not exact, one must call it *faith*, a faith to which Vincent fell a martyr!" This is the element which seems to be entirely missing in Rimbaud—faith, whether in God, man or art. It is the absence of this which makes his life seem gray and at times pure black. Nevertheless, the similarities of temperament between the two men are most numerous and striking. The greatest bond between them is the purity of their art. The measure of this purity is given in terms of suffering. With the turn of the century this sort of anguish seems no longer possible. We enter a new climate, not a better one necessarily, but one in which the artist becomes more callous, more indifferent. Whoever now experiences anything approaching that sort of agony, and registers it, is branded as "an incurable romantic." One is not expected to *feel* that way any longer.

In July 1880, Van Gogh wrote to his brother one of those letters which goes to the heart of things, a letter that draws blood. In reading it one is reminded of Rimbaud. Often in their letters there is an identity of utterance which is striking. Never are they more united than when they are defending themselves against unjust accusations. In this particular letter Van Gogh is defending himself against the aspersion of idleness. He describes in detail two kinds of idleness, the evil sort and the profitable sort. It is a veritable sermon on the subject, and worth returning to again and again. In one part of this letter we hear the echo of Rimbaud's very words . . . "So you must not think that I disavow things," he writes. "I am rather faithful in my unfaithfulness, and though changed, I am the same, and my only anxiety is: how can I be of use in the world, cannot I serve some purpose and be of any good, how can I learn more and study profoundly certain subjects? You see, that is what preoccupies me constantly, and then I feel myself imprisoned by poverty, excluded from participating in certain work, and certain necessary things are beyond my reach. That is one reason for not being without melancholy, and then one feels an emptiness where there might be friendship and strong and serious affections, and one feels a terrible discouragement gnawing at one's very moral energy, and fate seems to put a barrier to the instincts of affection, and a flood of disgust rises to choke one. And one exclaims: 'How long, my God!'"

Then he goes on to differentiate between the man who is idle from laziness, from lack of character, from the baseness of

his nature, and the other sort of idle man who is idle in spite of himself, who is inwardly consumed by a great longing for action, who does nothing because it is impossible for him to do anything, and so on. He draws a picture of the bird in the gilded cage. And then he adds—pathetic, heart-rending, fateful words—: “And men are often prevented by circumstances from doing things, a prisoner in I do not know what horrible, horrible, most horrible cage. There is also, I know it, the deliverance, the tardy deliverance. A just or unjustly ruined reputation, poverty, fatal circumstances, adversity, that is what it is that keeps us shut in, confines us, seems to bury us, but, however, one feels certain barriers, certain gates, certain walls. Is all this imagination, fantasy? I do not think so. And then one asks: ‘My God! is it for long, is it for ever, is it for eternity?’ Do you know what frees one from this captivity? It is every deep, serious affection. Being friends, being brothers, love, that is what opens the prison by supreme power, by some magic force. But without this one remains in prison. There where sympathy is renewed, life is restored.”

What a parallel there is between Rimbaud's exiled existence among the natives of Abyssinia and Van Gogh's voluntary retirement amidst the inmates of a lunatic asylum! Yet it was in these bizarre settings that both men found a relative measure of peace and satisfaction. For eight years, says Enid Starkie, “Rimbaud's sole friend and comforter seems to have been Djami, the Harari boy of fourteen or fifteen, his body servant, his constant companion . . . Djami was one of the few people in his life whom he remembered and talked of with affection, the only friend of whom he spoke on his death-bed, when the thought of other men usually turn to those whom they have known in their early youth.” As for Van Gogh, it is the postman Roulin who stands by him in the darkest hours. His great longing to find some one with whom he could live and work never materialized in the outside world. The experience with Gauguin was not only disastrous but fatal. When at last he found the good Dr. Gachet at Auvers it was too late, his moral fibre had been sapped. “To suffer without complaint is the only lesson we have to learn in this life.” That was the conclusion Van Gogh drew from his bitter experience. It is on this note of supreme resignation that his life comes to an end. Van Gogh passed away in July 1890. A year later Rimbaud writes to his relatives: “*Adieu mariage, adieu famille, adieu avenir! Ma vie est passée. Je ne suis plus qu'un tronçon immobile.*”

No two men more ardently desired liberty and freedom than these two imprisoned spirits. Both seemed to deliberately choose

the most difficult path for themselves. For both the cup of bitterness was filled to overflowing. In both men there lived a wound which never healed. Some eight years before his death, Van Gogh reveals in one of his letters what the second great disappointment in love had done to him. "A single word made me feel that nothing is changed in me about it, that it is and remains a wound, which I carry with me, but it lies deep and will never heal, it will remain in after years just what it was the first day." Something of the sort happened to Rimbaud, also; though we know almost nothing about this unhappy affair, it is hard not to believe that the effect was equally devastating.

There is one quality which they had in common which also deserves to be noticed—the utter simplicity of their daily requirements. They were ascetic as only saints can be. It is thought that Rimbaud lived poorly because he was miserly. But when he had amassed a considerable sum he showed himself willing to part with it at the first call. Writing to his mother from Harar in 1881, he says: "*Si vous avez besoin, prenez de quoi est à moi: c'est à vous. Pour moi, je n'ai personne à qui songer, sauf ma propre personne, qui ne demande rien.*" When one thinks that these men, whose work has been an unending source of inspiration to succeeding generations, were forced to live like slaves, that they had difficulty in securing their sustenance, which was hardly more than a coolie demands, what are we to think of the society from which they sprang? Is it not evident that such a society is preparing its own rapid downfall? In one of his letters from Harar, Rimbaud contrasts the natives of Abyssinia with the civilized whites. "*Les gens du Harar ne sont ni plus bêtes, ni plus canailles, que les negres blancs des pays dit civilisés; ce n'est pas du même ordre, voilà tout. Ils sont même moins méchants, et peuvent, dans certain cas, manifester la reconnaissance et de la fidélité. Il s'agit d'être humain avec eux.*" Like Van Gogh, he was more at home with the despised and the down-trodden than with men of his own milieu. Rimbaud took a native woman to satisfy his affection, while Van Gogh acted as a husband (and father of her children) to an unfortunate woman inferior to him in every way, a woman who made his life unbearable. Even in the matter of carnal love they were denied the privileges of the ordinary man. The less they demanded of life the less they received. They lived like scarecrows, amidst the abundant riches of our cultural world. Yet no two men of their time could be said to have refined their senses in anticipation of a feast more than they. In the space of a few years they had not only eaten up, but eaten through, the

accumulated heritage of several thousand years. They were faced with starvation in the midst of seeming plenty. It was high time to give up the ghost. Europe was already actively preparing to destroy the mould which had grown to fit like a coffin. The years which had intervened since their death belong to that dark side of life in whose shadow they had struggled to breathe. All that is barbarous, false, un-lived out, is coming to the surface with the force of an eruption. We are beginning at last to realize how very un-modern is this boasted "modern" age. The truly modern spirits we have done our best to kill off. Their yearning does indeed seem romantic now; they spoke the language of the soul. We are now talking a dead language, each a different one. Communication is finished; we have only to deliver the corpse.

* * *

"I shall probably leave for Zanzibar next month," Rimbaud writes in one of his letters. In another he is thinking of going to China or to India. Every now and then he inquires what news about the canal (Panama)? He will travel to the end of the earth if there is hope there of eking out a living. It never occurs to him to return to his own country and begin life anew. It is always the exotic place to which his mind turns.

What a familiar chord that strikes! How often, in the early days, I dreamed of going to Timbuctoo! If that was impossible, then to Alaska or the Polynesian Islands. In the Trocadero Museum once I stood gazing for a long time at the faces of the natives in the Caroline Islands. As I studied their beautiful features I recalled that distant relatives of ours had settled there. If I could ever get there, I thought, I would feel "at home" at last. As for the Orient, that has always been in the back of my head, a longing which began early in childhood. Not only China and India, but Java, Bali, Burma, the state of Nepal, Tibet. Never once has it occurred to me that I would have difficulties in those far away places. It always seemed to me that I would be welcomed with open arms. To return to New York, on the other hand, was a frightening thought. The city whose every street I know like a book, where I have so many friends, remains the last place on earth I would turn to. I would rather die than be forced to spend the rest of my days in the place of my birth. I can only visualize myself returning to New York as utterly destitute, as a cripple, as a man who has given up the ghost.

With what curiosity I read the early letters of Rimbaud! He has just begun his wanderings; he rambles on discursively about

the sights he has seen, the nature of the land, the trifles which the folks at home always read with delight and excitement. He is certain that when he gets to his destination he will find suitable employment. He is sure of himself, everything will go well. He is young, full of high spirits, and there is so much to see in this great world. It does not take long for the tone to change. For all the verve and ebullience he displays, for all his willingness to work, for all that he possesses in the way of talent, ingenuity, doggedness, adaptability, he discovers before very long that there is really no place for a person like himself anywhere. The world does not want originality; it wants conformity, slaves, more slaves. The place for the genius is in the gutter, digging ditches, or in the mines or quarries, somewhere where his talents will *not* be employed. A genius looking for employment is one of the saddest sights in the world. He fits in nowhere, nobody wants him. He is maladapted, says the world. With that, the doors are rudely slammed in his face. But is there no place at all for him, then? Oh yes, there is always room at the very bottom. Have you never seen him along the waterfront loading sacks of coffee or some other "necessary" commodity? Have you not observed how well he washes dishes in the kitchen of a filthy restaurant? Have you not seen him lugging bags and valises at the railway station?

I was born in New York where there is every opportunity to succeed, as the world imagines. It is not so difficult for me to visualize myself standing in line at the employment agencies and the charity bureaus. The only job I ever seemed capable of filling in those days was that of dish-washer. And then I was always too late. There are thousands of men always ready and eager to wash dishes. Often I surrendered my place to another poor devil who seemed to me a thousand times worse off than myself. Sometimes, on the other hand, I borrowed money for carfare or a meal from one of the applicants in line and then forgot all about getting a job. If I saw an ad for something I liked better in a neighboring city I would go there first, even if it meant wasting the whole day to get there. I've several times traveled a thousand miles and more in quest of a chimerical job, a job as waiter, for example. Often the thought of adventure stimulated me to go far afield. I might pick up a conversation with a man en route which would alter the whole course of my life. I might "sell" myself to him, just because I was so desperate. So I reasoned to myself. Sometimes I was offered the job I went in search of, but knowing deep down that I could never hold it, I would turn

round and go home again. Always on an empty stomach, to be sure. All arrivals and departures were on an empty stomach. That is the second thing always associated with genius—the lack of food. In the first place he is not wanted, in the second place there is no food for him. And in the third place he knows not where to lay his head. Aside from these discomforts he leads, as every one knows, the life of Reilly. He is lazy, shiftless, unstable, treacherous, a liar, a thief, a vagabond. He causes dissatisfaction wherever he roams. Truly, an impossible person. Who can get along with him? No one, not even himself.

Why harp on the ugly, the discordant things? The life of a genius is not all dirt and misery. Every one has his troubles, whether he is a genius or not. Yes, that is true too. And nobody appreciates that truth more than the man of genius. Every now and then you will find the genius coming forth with a plan to save the world, or a method of regeneration, at least. These are laughed off as wild dreams, as thoroughly Utopian. "Christmas on Earth!" for example. What a coke dream! Let him first prove that he can navigate on his own, you say. How can he save others if he is incapable of saving himself? The classic answer. Irrefutable. But the genius never learns. He was born with the dream of Paradise, and no matter how crazy it sounds, he will struggle to make it realizable again and again. He is incorrigible, a recidivist in every sense of the word. He understands the past, he embraces the future—but the present is meaningless to him. Success holds no bait for him. He spurns all rewards, all opportunities. He is a malcontent. Even when you accept his work, he has no use for you. He is already engaged on another work; his orientation has shifted, his enthusiasm is elsewhere. What can you do for him? How can you appease him? You can do nothing. He is beyond reach. He is after the impossible.

This unlovely image of the man of genius is, I think, a fairly accurate one. Though somewhat different, necessarily, it probably describes the plight of the unusual man even in primitive societies. The primitives too have their misfits, their neurotics, their psychopaths. We persist, nevertheless, in believing that this condition need not be so, that a day may come when this type of individual will not only find a place in the world but be honored and looked up to. Maybe this is a coke dream too. Maybe adaptation, harmony, peace and communion are varieties of mirage which will forever delude us. The fact, however, that we created these concepts, that they have the deepest meaning for us, means that they are realizable. They may have been created out of

need, but they will become realities through desire. The man of genius usually lives *as if* these dreams were possible of fulfillment. He is too charged with the potency of them to live them out for himself; he is, in this sense, akin to those supreme renunciators who refuse Nirvana until all men are able to realize it with them.

"The golden birds which flit through the umbrage of his poems!" Whence came those golden birds of Rimbaud's? And whither do they fly? They are neither doves nor vultures; they inhabit the airs. They are private messengers hatched in darkness and released in the light of illumination. They bear no resemblance to the creatures of the air, neither are they angels. They are the rare birds of the spirit, birds of passage who flit from sun to sun. They are not imprisoned in the poems, they are liberated there. They rise with wings of ecstasy and vanish in the flame.

Conditioned to ecstasy, the poet is like a gorgeous unknown bird mired in the ashes of thought. If he succeeds in freeing himself, it is to make a sacrificial flight to the sun. His dreams of a regenerate world are but the reverberations of his own fevered pulse beats. He imagines the world will follow him, but in the blue he finds himself alone. Alone but surrounded by his creations; sustained, therefore, to meet the supreme sacrifice. The impossible has been achieved; the duologue of author with Author is consummated. And now forever through the ages the song expands, warming all hearts, penetrating all minds. At the periphery the world is dying away; at the center it glows like a live coal. In the great solar heart of the universe the golden birds are gathered in unison. There it is forever dawn, forever peace, harmony and communion. Man does not look to the sun in vain; he demands light and warmth not for the corpse which he will one day discard but for his inner being. His greatest desire is to burn with ecstasy, to commerge his little flame with the central fire of the universe. If he accords the angels wings so that they may come to him with messages of peace, harmony and radiance from worlds beyond, it is only to nourish his own dreams of flight, to sustain his own belief that he will one day reach beyond himself, and on wings of gold.

One creation matches another; in essence they are all alike. The brotherhood of man consists not in thinking alike, nor in acting alike, but in aspiring to praise creation. The song of creation springs from the ruins of earthly endeavor. The outer man dies away in order to reveal the golden bird which is winging its way towards divinity.

THE GAME

Jane Mayhall

SPRING. The smell of crushed violets and the oncoming sea-wave green grass. A low-hanging willow tree, with leaves like copper fish, drifted lazily over the curbstone. Through the lumberyard fence a high wind sang, and then sifted noiselessly into a swirling heap of wood-shavings.

Up the street, past the lumber mill, over the railroad tracks, the little girl walked. When she came to the closed candy store, with penny prizes in the window, she gave one quick glance and went on. She was twelve years old, crisp muslin white, calico pink, starched cotton. Her face burned with the morning soap and water. Her brown hair, combed just twenty minutes ago by her mother, was set into scallops of motion by the early April wind. The morning wind swirled over her as she came to an open area in the middle of the street; she was almost lifted up by the heels. The little girl was small for her age, edged like a paper doll, light as a leaf. She had to cling to her school satchel to keep from being carried away.

Her mother had said, "But why are you going to school so early? It's only seven o'clock. You must love that school."

What excuse had she given? She could not even remember. But her mother was not fooled. Her mother knew, with the sure instinct of jealousy, that she was already thinking of something else. She felt her age, her twelve years, like something else growing in the house, something which did not belong there. Once she had looked straight into her mother's eyes and it was terrifying. The eyes of her mother were self-conscious with confession. It was no use pretending. She could leave a wreckage of toys on the back porch, her card games, her jump-ropes, her silly girl-books, but her mother knew that it was all lying. The little girl remembered the jump-ropes, coiled in the corner like red snakes with diamonds on their backs. . . The true thing

could not be said. In her mother's eyes she read that it must never be mentioned, whatever it was.

"Well, go on to school," her mother would speak. "You always have your own way."

And she said it with a kind of pride. While she hated the departure of her baby, while she knew her soft little girl, too small for her age, was going away from her, the mother could always say to the neighbors, "That child has a will of her own."

At the gate of the School Yard, the little girl stopped for a moment. There, half-hidden by weeds and cinders, she spied a mock orange peeping out. It must have fallen off that old crooked tree next to the iron grill fence. She looked at the tree carefully. There was no more of the fruit to be seen. So she stooped over and picked up the cindery mock orange, rolling it around on her fingers. The surface of the orange was hard, its green-studded pores rubbed stickily against the palm of her hand. With sudden excitement, she pitched the fruit into the air and saw it squash against the fence, its milky seeds exploding all at once.

Then, she picked up her satchel quickly and started through the gate.

In front of the School the flag had not been put up yet and the flag pole jutted gray and straight, like a ship's mast, into the bright blue sky. On the windows of the School were pasted colored-paper cuts of flower pots, green-leafed geraniums and yellow daisies. She looked around, wondering if the Entrance door was unlocked.

She saw, by the gymnasium steps, that the little door that was used at play periods was half-opened. The sun touched the brass door hinges with a soft beckoning light. The little girl hurried over and, gripping her school satchel with both hands, shouldered her way through the partially opened door.

She walked down the big clean-smelling lower hall. The lines of gray lockers were silent as sentinels and she rushed past them quickly, bounding up the center stairs, hearing her feet patter weightlessly on the hard marble.

As she came to the top of the stairway, she paused out of breath. Her heart throbbed in a familiar pain.

There, bubbling in oceans of sunlight, was the room she sought. Facing the east and south, it was always golden colored, almost transparent, with long clean-washed windows and the woodwork shelves a rich varnished brown. This was the School Library, smelling of books and glue and freshly cut leather.

The double doors were thrown open and she knew that he was there.

Pretending not to look for him, she came in and put her books on the table. Her cheeks were flaming as if she had thrust her head into a fire.

She heard his voice. He was in the little glassed-in work-room at the side.

"Anne?" he said. "Is that you, Anne?"

She did not answer. It gave a slowness and a reality not to answer. She waited for his step on the thick linoleum floor. Clip-clap, clip-clap. She anticipated every move, as he walked around the long study tables. Then she looked up.

He stood high above her. She came only to the crook of his elbow. He was like a tower, a cliff, or a dangerous landscape into which she might leap. For a moment she could not see him clearly. But the sudden intimate thrust of his head and shoulders against the burning glass-lit sunlight made him as near as herself.

With great gulping thirst, the little girl drank him in. She was savage with love. Like babies who hold kittens in their grasp, she strangled her wrists like tiny throats.

And always she felt, at the moment, without articulation. She felt like one of the nameless faces of the other children in the School. She struggled with this feeling, trying to form individual words. He was twenty-four years old, twice her age. What should she say to him? Her heart beat like a fist against her ribs.

"Well, Anne," he said presently, "you got here when you said you would."

He knew. Quite suddenly, as if he had just made up his mind to the fact, he smiled with sardonic pleasure. He felt her hunger for him. He let her eyes taste his fine heavy cheek and the honey-gold transparent skin. He was almost like a big animal being stroked; his darkened lids lowered a moment as if he would fall asleep.

She leaned against the chair dizzily. He smelled like cigarettes, his blue suit had the odor of tobacco and something harsh, indefinable, acrid like the crushed milky seeds of mock oranges. His eyes were wide now and would not leave her; they were blue with flecks of sea-gold that darted into her like arrows.

She had known him for a year. He was the young School Librarian, walking all day knee-deep in dirty howling factory children . . . children like herself. He had caught her from the dirty mess, as she rolled up from the blackened waters like a piece of bright paper. He gripped her in his hand. She saw that

he was struggling to hold her beyond the rest. It was this that drove her to a distracted adoration. It was this that made her demand that her mother let her wear a clean dress every day to School. The tortured filaments of pride twisted round her heart.

No one in the School knew, but he read books to her endlessly. It was with the madness of books that he caught the bud of her thoughts and ripped it into strangely shaped flowers. Her dreams changed, as if her body had turned over in a landscape of sleep.

He plucked out pages from the Library shelves and read them, looking to see what she would say afterwards. There was a hard scorn in his eyes, and when she was alone she could see herself mirrored in that blazing image of scorn. And she wanted to break the glass, to distort her face, to become something she was not. . .

Anne allowed the Librarian to read to her. She nodded slowly, with timid good manners. And under her scalloped brown hair there was a wild-cat-of-desire, clawing to be let out.

Now, he walked to the library desk with her and pointed out some tasks she might perform for him. He regarded her with the same sardonic delight. She was twelve years old, but she was not fooled, not the least bit! He had been married for two years and was full of the thoughts of women. The little girl had seen his wife, a tall silk-footed woman with pale eyes the color of stone. Her voice had a high nasal sweetness, and she had not seemed to care for him at all. Anne watched them carefully together, taking what she could from their faces as they talked in low voices one day during Study Period. She was inflamed with thoughts of the Librarian's wife, she tried to listen to what they would say. But they had scarcely spoken to each other.

Anne was small and half-developed, in anklets and knee length dresses. That was part of the secret between the little girl and the Librarian . . . that it was unclear, that there was promise in the unclearness. Ah, he would gather her formless self like a ball into his hand, and squeeze the life into her.

The two of them stooped over the desk and examined the rubber book stamps. She watched the supple turn of his wrists, under the shirt cuff. In the pit of her stomach, like a hot cinder, there was the wish to kiss, to bite that wrist. Her lips were as warm with stinging impulses, to speak, to taste. . . But she stood stiffly apart, waiting for him to direct her to her tasks.

They were to spend a half hour, every morning, taking inventory. The Principal of the School had given her permission.

"The Principal asked," he said mockingly, "if you were old enough for the job."

"I don't care what she asks," she said coldly, her words sounding as silly as monkeys.

"Well, if you don't, she does," the radiant devil of a smile bespangled his face, he was shining with passionate evil. "She has to be careful who gets special permission around here."

Sin and the hot hands of welcome encircled her thoughts. Her head fell heavily as if it rested against a pillow. But his arm was fully three inches away.

"—if you know what I mean," he winked suggestively.

She reddened. But this was the way they wanted it. It was the little door whose key they held. It was the quick look into the impossible.

"I shouldn't read those books to you either," he said, as if he had just been accused. "Did you ever think of that?" His eyes were searching her, but she did not look up.

She had sat down and was copying out library cards, her writing going carefully in large curving letters. He watched her for a moment.

"I'm not good for you. You know that," he said bitterly, with sudden anger.

"Yes, my mother says I should not come here so much," she retorted.

But she knew he was pretending and so was she. It was a game, some kind of haphazard game that brought her mind into naked bold play. Her mind ran unclothed everywhere, it was not afraid of anything. Its fears were pleasure; she broke through the dark corners of the world with ecstatic nakedness. No matter what her mother said, or the preacher in church, or what her little girl-playmates cautioned, she was totally unafraid. Even when her flesh was bathed in a terror of dreams, even when she wept against the threats of her mother and father and her dirty playmates, even then she cast them off as dead weights. And she hurtled through the darkness alone.

She stood alone with him. The spring and the echoing quietness of the School. Distantly, she could hear the Janitor down the hall, his wooden handled broom, its enchanting hollow click! click! and the faraway *brush* sound against the floor.

And then, as if this were a signal, there was suddenly the ringing of the first entrance bell. She looked up startled. A few minutes more with the young Librarian. He stood at her side like a knife. He was her sharp weapon, he was the blade set against

the others. Soon the tousled-headed children would come by, with crumpled shirts and cotton dresses, and dragging their shoes with all the unshaped mass of their childishness. They would pass her like broken roots and mud. But she was beyond them, hurtling into strange torrents, beaten into the rocks.

Then the man beside her did a daring thing. He brought his hand fully down on her own.

"You made a mistake there," he said cruelly.

The engulfing warmth of his hand seemed to be pulling her down. She quivered, but kept her eyes on the library card. She must continue to write, no matter what happened. The lines on the card went off into splinters, so intently did she gaze.

Now the noisy wilderness of children was growing over them. He moved back again, and they could hear the windy voices of little boys and girls, their shrieks from the playground, and their feet in the hall stirring up great soughing sounds like a storm coming near. And now, it was like the trampling of horses and like the whistling of birds. It came nearer. Or, it was like a fire spreading over a dry wood. They listened intently, neither of them speaking.

Then, with a quick gesture, he peeled back his shirt cuff and looked at his watch.

"How could it be almost eight o'clock?" he said irritably. She shuddered with joy that he should mind. But catching her expression, his eyes narrowed.

"We haven't accomplished a thing," he said.

Now she must be quick. She must tell him, she must loosen the shield of his age from him, she must strike him to his knees somehow. . .

She leaned back in the chair, the wooden backrest touching her little shoulder bones. And her tongue felt as if it were a flame, a tender flame licking out to consume him.

"Did you know—" her heart thumped like a woodpecker and she thought she would die. "Did you know—that Mary Louise Hamilton's father is in love with me?"

He looked at her as if he thought she had gone crazy.

"Anyway," her mouth opened and seemed to dry in the words. "That's what he said."

It had been yesterday afternoon. She knew, when it happened, that she wanted to tell the Librarian about it. She even wanted to tell him how the furniture looked, the black upright piano in Mary Louise's living room, the milk bottle with the blue paper flower in it, sitting on the parlor table. Mary Louise was

thirteen years old and was her best friend. She wanted to add that too. But she could not pull all of the impressions together.

The little girl sat, with her cheeks glowing hot, trying to tell these things to the Librarian. She also wanted to describe Mary Louise's father, a tall anonymous-looking man who wore overalls and was always grinning. But she could not remember what he really looked like.

"What do you mean?" the Librarian was saying. "What is it all about?" There was a fury and curious hate in his voice. "What have you been *doing*, you little fool?"

"I didn't do anything!" she said, her lips were dry like hard jewels. "But last night, when I was at Mary Louise's house, and she went out of the room for a minute, and there wasn't anybody there—her father came over and—" she looked at him now, dreading at last to let fall this sordid treasure before his sight, and yet having begun could not stop. "And he tried to kiss me—yes, he did." She shook her head, feeling suddenly tired.

"My god!" he laughed, his mouth struggling with anger. "You fool! You stupid idiot! Acting like that! It must have been the way you looked. You must have looked some way at him."

She sat silently, feeling a slow tired relaxation coming over her hands. She had ceased to write and was sitting dazedly, looking at the floor. The spring sunlight came through the wide transparent windows. It bathed her shoulders and seeped through the cloth of her crisp cotton dress.

"My god, my god!" he was laughing.

Then he looked at her with a cold tenderness, the corners of his mouth still smiling.

"But it's not my fault. You can't say it's my fault. I never—"

He stopped, and the goat feet of the children were approaching, the wild flute screams of their voices. Their hundreds of shoes sounded over the corridors like the wind. He turned his head sidewise, watching the door, his short sedge-colored hair gleaming in the sunlight.

"I never—" he bent close to her ear, "—never touched you."

MY MATERNAL AUNT

Tito Guerrini

MANY, MANY YEARS AGO I used to go to the movies with my maternal aunt every Saturday night. In winter, to save time, we would take the roughly paved crossroads, suddenly lonely and fallen into the halo of a mysterious and equivocal night. Then I would cling to her, my nose well protected and lost between scarf and coat collar, feeling warm in the yielding bend of her arm and in the muted contact through the soft, exciting hair of her fur coat with her lavender soaked body.

Coming back from the show I would be drowsy, my eyes half closed, and it was nice to be dragged by the familiar hand through darkness and imagined dangers on the road which led home to the languid and comfortable though humble peace—to the end of all adventures.

At home, the same supper of every day and of past and future years, uniform in an unreasoned way, transporting me beyond Time with its colorless, prosaic smell, would be waiting on the plain kitchen table. I would eat very fast anxious to be in bed where I could lay my head on the pillow, the last refuge after the busy day. Between mouthfuls I would ask, "Did you like the picture?" I would stuff my mouth till my head would become dizzy and my stomach would ache from having been empty so long.

"Yes, well enough," she would answer, and I don't remember her ever showing more interest than that no matter what the story of the film. It was as if she felt an indefinite feeling of superiority towards the things which she had seen that had to be included among the unreal ones, even if, during the show, in spite of herself and almost angry, she would furtively take out her handkerchief.

This happened invariably during such pathetic scenes as, for example, when the heroine, behind the tapers of the altar

was praying fervently to the Madonna, beseeching Her to save her lover. (I would look at her tears, observing how they came up smoothly from her throat to her eyes, mechanically as if she had a reservoir.) Sometimes she would also laugh, a strange and low pitched laugh (while mine was shrill and spasmodic) at the amusing scenes in some comic pictures. (To tell the truth, until I was sixteen years old, the fictitious adventures on the screen were our real nourishment and I knew she dreamed like me, like me she allowed those dear, never to be forgotten images to substitute for a love that didn't exist in our everyday lives.) She had not married, she used to tell me, because she wanted to stay with me, motherless since my birth. She was quick to assure me, however, that she had had no lack of opportunities. And yet, sometimes she could not help yielding to the most innocent and natural attractions of a life which she strived to convince herself was real and lived.

But not always like this was my maternal aunt. On the contrary, she was sometimes nervous and would scream for a trifle especially when she felt that in some way I had violated her principles. (Principles she certainly had, in fixed and unchangeable categories, a sort of unreasoned morality of hers transmitted to her through the venerated education of her parents, a morality she had dragged along with her since childhood.)

"I swear I'm not going to take you to the movies for two weeks," she would scream, "I swear it on my eyes . . . you see, for me the oath is sacred!" Her voice would rise to an exalted pitch as if, in a way, she were pleased with the punishment she had inflicted on me and with the words she had pronounced. (Days later, to my pleas to go to the movies, pleas which I knew to be useless from the beginning in spite of my uncontrolled and spasmodic wish to reach the impossible—and that was also the first step toward the future pain of existence—she would invariably answer: "I swore it on my eyes!")

Other times, in more serious cases, she would give me a good thrashing with the handle of a feather duster. Then I would run through the rooms, crying and twisting, her yelling joining with mine as in an adventure of childhood, until both our voices became hoarse. Then, with dilated eyes and swollen neck veins, she would throw herself on her bed, still mumbling: "You're a chip off the old block!" thus referring to my father who, besides having deserted me, had done her rather serious pecuniary injustices. I would lie on my bed which was in the same room still hitting my head with my fists, though more weakly, looking at

her lean shoulders as at a sign of silent hostility. Then, almost immediately, I would fall asleep, my mind averted to other thoughts, still keeping in my ear the sound of her hoarse voice. (Strange was her love. I remember that sometimes, while asleep, I would hear her get up and kiss me lightly on the forehead, a caress as sweet as a mother's caress on the screen.)

When I grew older, I began to revolt against my aunt whenever we quarreled. (Quarrels always occurred over some trifle as if only in them could we find a real attachment to life.) She would shout again: "Rascal! Now you are abusing me!" blindly hitting me, as if by instinct, on the shoulders and face. And in those moments I would lose my head, wildly returning her blows, so hard that once I actually bruised her mouth.

When calmed down, I would immediately repent having screamed, and hit, (I remember how, before giving vent to my anger, I would feel a sort of itching in all my limbs, almost a crazy need to jump and fret). This was an almost natural consequence after what had happened. (Later on, I knew that it would always end like this anyway.) I would be anxious to kiss her, crying over my wickedness. I would swear that I would never behave so again, and, putting my arms around her thin neck, which she would try to keep from me, I would kiss her on her swollen and fierce eyes. But never would she forgive me right away. She would say with a harsh voice: "This is Judas' kiss." But I would notice a kind of calm in her voice as if she were tired. "Go away. I will never forgive you," anger not yet entirely gone from her voice, "and at least wait until it's over a little bit," she would hastily add, as if she knew that by destiny we would always be reconciled in the end.

Afterwards, she would be sulky. I knew then that she was lonely as I was, both shut in an obstinate and conventional silence. What made us unhappy and hostile in our grief was the awareness of the desperate falsehood in our silence. Finally, I was always the one to give in, inviting her with honeyed words to forget the past. Then I would ask her, "Shall we go to the movies?" And she, aware of the scheming in my voice, would repeat, "I swore it on my eyes" as if she were determined to make me atone for my sins till the very end.

But one Saturday night at the movies—I was then a child not yet ten years old—it happened that a man with a thin mustache and broad glossy temples approached our seats on her side. I don't remember exactly what she said and how he began talking, but during every intermission he would have something

to say. He would congratulate me on my size (quite exceptional for my age) and on my going to highschool next year—this my aunt had told him, smiling. He gave me candies which I accepted with thanks, though not without wondering why he had them ready in his pocket. To my aunt, he offered a cigarette which she accepted although she never smoked except on birthdays. When the show was over, he insisted on seeing us home, saying I was a very bright boy and that he “enjoyed” (he expressed himself in this way which I found very funny) my company. Then he would invite us into a bar for a cup of chocolate and would offer me pastries which I would accept greedily in spite of my aunt’s warning gestures. He would speak gallantly to my aunt, addressing her with phrases the exact meaning of which I couldn’t grasp. She would stare at me as if she weren’t listening to him, yet I could tell by her amazed look that she heard these words and that she also liked them. At a certain moment, he tried to take her hand but she set herself free, gasping, “No!” and involuntarily pressing my hand held in hers.

When we were at home and I was already in bed (turned toward the wall so as not to see her undress) I said, not knowing why, “Now you are going to have a fiancée.” She hesitated a little before answering, then she said, “Silly!” and I knew I had hit the mark. Anyway, she kissed me on the forehead as usual, then she went to bed, read the paper for about fifteen minutes and put out the light. I stayed awake, dreaming of having a fiancée to take to the movies and to the bars. Then I thought of that thin mustache, that broad-templed smiling face which had said, “I enjoy your company.” The uneasiness made me fall asleep. But my maternal aunt never found the time nor courage to see her suitor again.

When I was about fifteen years old my grandmother died. and, because my aunt had also to go to an office, we took a maid to look after the house.

The maid was as lean as an anchovy, more than twenty-five years old, and came from a village near the town. (I don’t know through which net of friends and acquaintances my aunt had succeeded in finding a woman with honesty and ability.) The maid was lean and I was only fifteen years old, nevertheless, as is natural, I had long before learned to do certain things. In a short while I led her astray (at the age of fifteen I was almost as tall as I am now) throwing her on the bed on summer afternoons when the heavy air drifting in through the half shut Venetian blinds mixed with the somewhat repellent smell of her

body. In spite of her attempts at rebellion every time the act was repeated, a strange intimacy developed between us. It was if the after feeling of repentance was shared between us as was the union of our bodies. And every Sunday morning we would go together to confess our sins; but I cannot say that the confession of our sins was of much use because almost every afternoon I would force her to undress completely and then, in order to see how ridiculous she looked in her thinness, I would push her on the bed with her mouth against the pillow as if to choke with an apparent brutality the vague sense of disgust which overwhelmed me.

Yet the feeling of guilt with me (within us) was becoming more acute every day and I feared that my aunt would read it on my gaunt face. Indeed, had she asked me about it, I would have been unable to answer as no confidences of this nature were possible between us. Perhaps I would have screamed that it wasn't true and would have run away, slamming the doors, and she would have screamed—louder than usual—that she had nursed a viper at her bosom. I didn't dread her screaming so much as the unreasoned and troubled fear of its cause.

I wished then that the maid would go away, I asked God to forgive me my sins, often and easily I would hit her naked body after the act, cruelly shouting, "You're a whore! You're a whore!"

I don't remember the reason why at a certain moment she went back to her village. Perhaps it was because her relatives wanted her. At any rate, my aunt never knew what there had been between us but I could not be satisfied with her apparent ignorance as if fearing that a larger layer of indifference and incomprehension would grow between us.

In the meantime, the talks with my aunt were becoming more and more infrequent and without interest. I had the impression now of our not having much to talk about. Sometimes she seemed very distant to me as if no tie had ever existed between us. This I worried about although I did nothing to change the situation. Even the quarrels, once customary between us, became less frequent.

Then I began knowing the charm of afternoons spent out with other boys at the movies or in the parks where for us the first girls were going by. Then, too, we began mixing almost unconsciously vague and light words with speeches that we wanted to be serious, so excited were we to talk of "love" and "happiness" almost as if we were trying to be men before the time to be men.

My aunt couldn't understand the pleasure of those summer afternoons. She would scream at me if I arrived home a little late, accusing me of having been in the most absurd places. I would be furious that she would think so, yet I couldn't help wishing that the things she imagined had actually taken place. Then I would answer every question with indifferent calm, thus encouraging her to suspect, as if I wished to make more acute the anxiety which overwhelmed her (even if, later, I would laughingly tell her the simple truth). Then she wouldn't know what to believe and would shake her head, appeased, saying I was a "cynic." This was the word with which my aunt began describing me at the time of my incipient puberty as if I were already grown up enough to deserve it.

Yet I could see that my aunt still loved me in spite of my alleged cynicism and waited for me to ask her to go to the movies. And except for the few times that I had other engagements, I always did. I also wished to go, not so much for the show, as for the never disappointed hope that the well known atmosphere would take me back, at least for a while, to that strange and happy time to which I still clung.

In spite of all, I knew that I loved my maternal aunt. I imagined already the upheaving movement of her shoulders when she would cry, the same lean shoulders that I could see from my bed before falling asleep. Then would I long for the kiss she would lay on my forehead as soon as I closed my eyes.

* * *

My love for Lisa lasted only six weeks. Gianni introduced her to me one Sunday on a trip to the sea. That morning before leaving home I knew that such a thing as falling in love with a girl would happen during the day. But coming home that night with my head in the clouds and my face burned by the sun and the new passion, I knew that my aunt would welcome me with a cold and knowing smile that would make the sacred intimacy of my fire sink into an unjustified shame.

Lisa wore a white bathing suit trimmed with small blue ribbons which made it fit right above the indentation from which started her two tiny breasts. She had blonde hair and gave the impression of being cross-eyed possibly because of her large brown eyes which she would sometimes turn in a strange way. I don't think that the words I said could show her, or my derisive companions, the confusion I felt inside. I did not talk very much nor did I join the boys in their comments on the women

who crowded the beach. I laughed secretly inside myself as if I had acquired a sudden freedom, far from the daily customs and manners of my maternal aunt. I wished that those moments would last forever and that I didn't have to leave Lisa and that place.

I saw her again on the following Sundays until she left with her parents for the country. Then I decided to open my heart to my friend, Gianni, who said as I expected, "You lucky one!" and patted me on the shoulder. I was pleased by his affirmation and I felt that I loved him very much also.

A few days later, I received a letter from Lisa. I remember that in a moment of enthusiasm I showed it to my aunt as if I were proud that a girl would write me. I don't know why, but I wished that all the world knew it. Yet, while she was reading, I knew that I was blushing, as if with a strange fear that others would find Lisa's sentences hackneyed. Instead, my aunt said, "Well!" and advised me to be sure that she was a good girl because beauty is not very important in certain cases. It was as if she felt—as I did at the time, though noticing something conventional in my aunt's advice—that it was a serious and lasting thing.

But I would have wished that my aunt had reacted in another way, that she would have spoken young and meaningless words, that she wouldn't have made me think of the future, that she were younger like a sister and would have thrown her arms around my neck.

But it wasn't long before I fled from home to reach Lisa. I was pushed by the need of lightening the monotony of love at a distance as well as a romantic sense of adventure. I sold some books to get enough money for the trip and I thought that the second-hand dealer to whom I went with the books as well as everybody I met on my way to the station would read on my face the shameful truth.

I remember that to give myself some importance I bought a package of luxury cigarettes. In the compartment crowded with perspiring people, I smoked, trying not to think. But it was impossible not to see before my eyes the aunt I had left behind reading the few lines written in haste. I knew that she would say— ". . . just a chip off the old block!" and perhaps on my return would beat me furiously with the rug-beater.

I stayed away only two days and I wasn't able to see Lisa who, not knowing that I was coming, had gone to see some rela-

tives in a nearby village. (This, I reasoned, was a punishment sent me from Heaven.)

During those two days I spent all the money I had on cigarettes and ice cream, eating little and badly. One evening I even went to the small rustic cinema so I would not have to think. I felt very lonely and in the absurd hope that Lisa might suddenly return, I sold some of the few articles of clothing I had brought with me so that I could stay longer and still pay my fare home.

When I got back I didn't find my aunt at home. (I learned from her later that she had gone around looking for me at all the police stations in town.) To rid myself of the persistent neurotic feeling of weariness that overwhelmed me, I took a bottle of wine from the kitchen table and lying on my bed, I drank as I had seen movie actors do. In this fashion I awaited her return.

For a long time my aunt looked at me without saying anything, as if exhausted by worry. Her eyes were hard and without light. I was half drunk and told her to leave me alone. Then I belched and turned toward the wall, falling asleep almost immediately.

It was only the following morning as if during the night she had gained strength that my aunt began to yell and beat me just as I had foreseen. I also beat her, but I didn't cry in repentance afterward, instead I went into the street to wander aimlessly.

Little by little I returned to my normal daily life, going to the movies with my aunt every Saturday night. During the day I could almost forget about Lisa but during the night I would repeat sadly to myself the words of the old times, noticing a new sense of detachment from the things that once looked alive and real, almost a painful awareness of losing the first commotions of adolescence. Now my aunt appeared distant and it didn't matter to me when she would renew with her words the history and pain of the follies we had gone through together.

I learned that Lisa had come back to town and was looking for me. God knows why, I thought angrily. Yet I was curious to see her for one last time, to tell her that it was better to call the whole thing off. (I can't remember whether the fear of remaining alone made me happy or sad.) I remember that she didn't cry as I had expected but turned terribly pale in the face, almost ashen, with a dead look. That moved me, and I was ready to begin all over again, instead, I placed a hand on her shoulder and without knowing why said, "It will soon be over. . ." I thought that I was good for nothing and that nothing in the world was good for anything, and strong was my hate for myself and for my aunt.

So I left Lisa and so ended my love for her.

That night going home, I decided to tell my aunt about what had happened, thinking that doing so would be an act of honesty and courage on my part.

That day she was calm. She was sitting by the window sewing an old petticoat. She said as she had said before, this time with a touch of sarcasm that filled me with a sense of eternity weighing down upon me with its irrevocable laws: "You're always the same, you change your mind every five minutes, perhaps you have found a new one." When she laughed, as I have said before, she would retain a certain sadness in her features which I thought nothing could ever erase.

This time I did not get angry with her, she with her narrow mind and thought patterns that would never change. I laughed with her, perhaps in the very shadow of my own destiny which I knew would never change.

I noticed white hair on her temples and pouches under her eyes. She looked very old and I wondered if, with her age, she was taking from me some of my green years. I pitied her and within myself I cried, reflecting (in a confusion of desperate and dramatic thoughts) on my present and future condition.

Translated from the Italian by William Demby

PAGES FROM COLD POINT

Paul Bowles

UNFORTUNATELY I THINK the concept of chaos is just as false as, let us say, the concepts of perfection or objective truth. This is not as I should like it to be. To be able to believe in chaos would mean being freed of all sense of inevitability—moreover, of any feeling of responsibility. I have never been able to attain this; one believes what one must. Undoubtedly, a state of absolute irrelevancy is unattainable, appearances to the contrary. But then, as I say, all absolutes are only results of the workings of the human mind with its incomplete powers of perception. I should not like it to be thought that I am so victimized by the circumstances of my life as to have become a misanthrope, and yet the fact remains that my immediate feeling for everything directly relating to humanity is one of profound pity. And of course pity is a kind of loathing. This minute I sit here on the terrace directly above the pounding of the waves against the cliffs, and I am conscious that only the proximity of an element so infinitely more powerful than man (how I hate the word “man”) makes it possible for me to continue my round of eating, sleeping, defecating and receiving consciousness. (I hate the word “man,” yes. It seems sometimes that in any other language it is more acceptable. But of course that is an absurdity?)

I say “receiving” because that is what I mean, yet I am aware that it is not clear. I do not make or give or be that consciousness; I am on the receiving end of the impulses. They arrive, are refracted or recorded,—in any case, experienced—, and that is all. It would be saying too much if I stated that I *am* conscious. Perhaps because any form of the verb “to be” seems too powerful to apply to a human being. I have colleagues back at the education factory who would delight in unsavory, orthodox explanations of all this: they would say that fundamentally it is but a

way of saying: "I wish there were no human beings," which statement, given my egocentricity, would be tantamount to wishing myself dead. That sort of thing strikes me as downright asinine. If I wished myself dead I should have only to take ten steps forward from the deck chair where I am seated at this instant. I do not wish anything at all. I sit here and I read, and I wait for the pleasant feeling of repletion that follows a good meal, to turn slowly, as the hours pass along, into the even more delightful, slightly stirring sensation deep within, which accompanies the awakening of the appetite.

The wind blows by my head; between each wave there are thousands of tiny licking and chopping sounds as the water hurries out of the crevices and holes; and a part-floating, part-submerged feeling of being in the water haunts my mind even as the hot sun burns my face. All this is enjoyable;—far more so, in fact, than actually going into the water, and certainly pleasanter than swimming out to the raft, a ritual I force upon myself each morning solely to please Racky, because he thinks that otherwise his father will get out of trim. This is a purely absurd whim on his part, but it is a logical element of the strange chaos which has recently become a part of my life. What is a person's "life" other than the string of impressions he receives while he exists as a single organism? And how can more feeble impressions acquire enough dignity to warrant being considered chaotic? Again I suspect that I am playing myself a trick: there is no chaos. What is going on here at Cold Point doubtless has quite a perceptible pattern, if one could only distinguish its contours. I do not mean such things as isolation and the resultant fears and hostilities; they are the fabrics of life,—not the pattern woven into the fabrics.

Our civilization is doomed to a short life; its component parts are too heterogeneous. I personally am content to see everything in the process of decay. The bigger the bombs, the quicker it will be done. Life is visually too hideous for one to make the attempt to preserve it. Let it go. Perhaps some day another form of life will come along. Either way, it is of no consequence. At the same time, I am still a part of life, and I am bound by this to protect myself to whatever extent I am able. And so I am here. Here in the Islands vegetation still has the upper hand, and man has to fight even to make his presence seen at all. It is beautiful here, the trade winds blow all year, and I suspect that bombs are extremely unlikely to be wasted on this unfrequented side of the island, if indeed on any part of it.

I was loath to give up the house after Hope's death. But it was the obvious move to make. My university career having always been an utter farce, (since I believe no reason inducing a man to "teach" can possibly be a valid one), I was elated by the idea of resigning; and as soon as her affairs had been settled and the money properly invested, I lost no time in doing so.

I think that week was the first time since childhood that I had managed to recapture the feeling of there being a content in existence. I went from one pleasant house to the next, making my adieux to the English quacks, the Philosophy fakirs, and so on;—even to those colleagues with whom I was merely on speaking terms. I watched the envy in their faces when I announced my departure by Pan American on Saturday morning; and the greatest pleasure I felt in all this was in being able to answer "Nothing" when I was asked, as invariably I was, what I intended to do.

When I was a boy people used to refer to Charles as "Big Brother C.," although he is only a scant year older than I. To me now he is merely "Fat Brother C.," a successful lawyer. His thick, red face and hands, his back-slapping joviality, and his fathomless hypocritical prudery, these are the qualities which make him truly repulsive to me. There is also the fact that he once looked not unlike the way Racky does now. And after all, he is still my big brother, and disapproves openly of everything I do. The loathing I feel for him is so strong that for years I have not been able to swallow a morsel of food or a drop of liquid in his presence without making a prodigious effort. No one knows this but me,—certainly not Charles, who would be the last one I should tell about it. He came up on the late train two nights before I left. He got quickly to the point,—as soon as he settled with a highball.

"So you're off for the wilds," he said, sitting forward in his chair like a salesman.

"If you can call it the wilds," I replied. "Certainly it's not wild like Mitichi." (He has a lodge in northern Quebec.) "I consider it really civilized."

He drank and smacked his lips together stiffly, bringing the glass down hard on his knee.

"And Racky. You're taking him along?"

"Of course."

"Out of school. Away. So he'll see nobody but you, You think that's good?"

I looked at him. "I do," I said.

"By God, if I could stop you legally, I would!" he cried, jumping up and putting his glass on the mantle. I was trembling inwardly with excitement, but I merely sat and watched him. He went on. "You're not fit to have custody of the kid!" he shouted. He shot a stern glance at me over his spectacles.

"You think not?" I said gently.

Again he looked at me sharply. "D'ye think I've forgotten?"

I was understandably eager to get him out of the house as soon as I could. As I piled and sorted letters and magazines on the desk I said: "Is that all you came to tell me? I have a good deal to do tomorrow and I must get some sleep. I probably shan't see you at breakfast. Agnes'll see that you eat in time to make the early train."

All he said was: "God! Wake up! Get wise to yourself! You're not fooling anybody, you know."

That kind of talk is typical of Charles. His mind is slow and obtuse; he constantly imagines that everyone he meets is playing some private game of deception with him. He is utterly incapable of following the functioning of even a moderately involved intellect that he finds the will to secretiveness and duplicity everywhere.

"I haven't time to listen to that sort of nonsense," I said, preparing to leave the room.

But he shouted: "You don't want to listen! No! Of course not! You just want to do what you want to do. You just want to go off down there and live as you've a mind to, and to hell with the consequences!" At this point I heard Racky coming downstairs. C. obviously heard nothing, and he raved on. "But just remember, I've got your number all right, and if there's any trouble with the boy I'll know who's to blame."

I hurried across the room and opened the door so he could see that Racky was there in the hallway. That stopped his tirade. It was hard to know whether Racky had heard any of it or not. Although he is not a quiet young person, he is the soul of discretion, and it is almost never possible to know any more about what goes on inside his head than he intends one to know.

I was annoyed that C. should have been bellowing at me in my own house. To be sure, he is the only one from whom I would accept such behavior, but then, no father likes to have his son see him take criticism meekly. Racky simply stood there in his bathrobe, his angelic face quite devoid of expression, saying, "Tell Uncle Charley good night for me, will you? I forgot."

I said I would, and quickly shut the door. When I thought Racky was back upstairs in his room, I bade Charles good night. I have never been able to get out of his presence fast enough. The effect he has on me dates from an early period of our lives, from days I dislike to recall.

* * *

Racky is a wonderful boy. After we arrived, when we found it impossible to secure a proper house near any town where he might have the company of English boys and girls his own age, he showed no signs of chagrin, although he must have been disappointed. Instead, as we went out of the renting office into the glare of the street, he grinned and said: "Well, I guess we'll have to get bikes, that's all."

The few available houses near what Charles would have called "civilization" turned out to be so ugly and so impossibly confining in atmosphere that we decided immediately on Cold Point, even though it was across the island and quite isolated on its seaside cliff. It was beyond a doubt one of the most desirable properties on the island, and Racky was as enthusiastic about its splendors as I.

"You'll get tired of being alone out there, just with me," I said to him as we walked back to the hotel.

"Aw, I'll get along all right. When do we look for the bikes?"

At his insistence we bought two the next morning. I was sure I should not make much use of mine, but I reflected that an extra bicycle might be convenient to have around the house. It turned out that the servants all had their own bicycles without which they would not have been able to get to and from the village of Orange Walk, eight miles down the shore. So for a while I was forced to get astride mine each morning before breakfast and pedal madly along beside Racky for a half hour. We would ride through the cool early air, under the towering cotton trees near the house, and out to the great curve in the shoreline where the waving palms bend landward in the stiff breeze that always blows there. Then we would make a wide turn and race back to the house, loudly discussing the degrees of our desires for the various items of breakfast we knew were awaiting us there on the terrace. Back home we would eat in the wind, looking out over the Caribbean, and talk about the news in yesterday's local paper, brought to us by Isiah each morning from Orange Walk. Then Racky would disappear for the whole morning on his bicycle, riding furiously along the road in one direction or the other until

he had discovered an unfamiliar strip of sand along the shore that he could consider a new beach. At lunch he would describe it in detail to me, along with a recounting of all the physical hazards involved in hiding the bicycle in among the trees, so that natives passing along the road on foot would not spot it, or in climbing down unscalable cliffs that turned out to be much higher than they had appeared at first sight, or in measuring the depth of the water preparatory to diving from the rocks, or in judging the efficacy of the reef in barring sharks and barracuda. There is never any element of braggadocio in Racky's relating of his exploits,—only the joyous excitement he derives from telling how he satisfies his inexhaustible curiosity. And his mind shows its alertness in all directions at once. I do not mean to say that I expect him to be an "intellectual." That is no affair of mine, nor do I have any particular interest in whether he turns out to be a thinking man or not. I know he will always have a certain boldness of manner and a great purity of spirit in judging values. The former will prevent his becoming what I call a "victim": he never will be brutalized by realities. And his unerring sense of balance in ethical considerations will shield him from the paralyzing effects of present-day materialism.

For instance: "I don't get these strikes back in the States," he said one morning at breakfast. "It's just greed, I think. They'd all be better off if they worked the way they used to in the Dark Ages, it seems to me, with every man minding his own business and not even knowing what's happening ten miles away."

I said that I agreed with him in principle, but that his suggestion was impractical, unrealizable. "Everything points toward more organization in the future, rather than less, I'm afraid."

"Ah, you're always pessimistic!" he cried. "I think some leader'll come along one of these days, some guy who'll be able to persuade 'em all to be sensible and disband everything. And you'll see how much happier they'll all be then!"

"They'll yell louder than ever," I said. "They'll call it Fascism."

"Oh, I didn't mean a political leader," he explained, getting up and turning away from the table to run his pocket comb through his hair, a thing he does a hundred times a day. "I meant a *real* leader. See you at lunch."

He bounded into the house and out the other side; a moment later I saw him between the palms, pedalling intently along the road toward Orange Walk. I sat a while over my coffee before I went in, considering the depth of his perception; his remarks

as usual had served to strengthen my conviction that for a boy of sixteen Racky had an extraordinary purity of vision. I do not say this as a doting father, although God knows I can never even think of the boy without that familiar overwhelming sensation of delight and gratitude for being vouchsafed the privilege of sharing my life with him. What he takes so completely as a matter of course, our daily life here together, is a source of never-ending wonder to me; and I reflect upon it a good part of each day, just sitting here being conscious of my great good fortune in having him all to myself, beyond the reach of prying eyes and malicious tongues. (I suppose I am really thinking of C. when I write that.) And I believe that a part of the charm of sharing Racky's life with him consists precisely in his taking it all so utterly for granted. I have never asked him whether he likes being here,—it is so patent that he does, very much. I think if he were to turn to me one day and tell me how happy he is here, that somehow, perhaps, the spell might be broken. Yet if he were to be thoughtless and inconsiderate, or even unkind to me, I feel that I should be able only to love him the more for it.

I have reread that last sentence. What does it mean? And why should I even imagine it could mean anything more than it says?

Still, much as I may try, I can never believe in the gratuitous, isolated fact. What I must mean is that I feel that Racky already has been in some way inconsiderate. But in what way? Surely I cannot resent his bicycle treks; I cannot expect him to want to stay and sit talking with me all day. And I never worry about his being in danger; I know he is more capable than most adults of taking care of himself, and that he is no more likely than any native to come to harm crawling over the cliffs or swimming in the bays. At the same time there is no doubt in my mind that something about our existence annoys me. I must resent some detail in the pattern, whatever that pattern may be. Perhaps it is just his youth, and I am envious of the lithe body, the smooth skin, the animal energy and grace.

For a long time this morning I sat looking out to sea, trying to solve that small puzzle. Two white herons came and perched on a dead stump east of the garden. They stayed a long time there without stirring. I would turn my head away and accustom my eyes to the bright sea-horizon, then I would look suddenly at them to see if they had shifted position, but they would always be in the same attitudes. I tried to imagine the black stump without them,—a purely vegetable landscape,—but it was im-

possible. All the while I was slowly forcing myself to accept a ridiculous explanation of my annoyance with Racky. It had made itself manifest to me only yesterday, when instead of appearing for lunch, he sent a young colored boy from Orange Walk to say that he would be lunching in the village. I could not help noticing that the boy was riding Racky's bicycle. I had been waiting lunch a good half hour for him, and I had Gloria serve immediately as the boy rode off, back to the village. I was curious to know in what sort of place and with whom Racky could be eating, since Orange Walk, as far as I know, is inhabited exclusively by Negroes, and I was sure Gloria would be able to shed some light on the matter, but I could scarcely ask her. However, as she brought on the dessert, I said: "Who was that boy that brought the message from Mister Racky?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "A young lad of Orange Walk. He's named Wilmot."

When Racky returned at dusk, flushed from his exertion, (for he never rides casually), I watched him closely. His behavior struck my already suspicious eye as being one of false heartiness and a rather forced good humor. He went to his room early and read for quite a while before turning off his light. I took a long walk in the almost day-bright moonlight, listening to the songs of the night insects in the trees. And I sat for a while in the dark on the stone railing of the bridge across Black River. (It is really only a brook that rushes down over the rocks from the mountain a few miles inland, to the beach near the house.) In the night it always sounds louder and more important than it does in the daytime. The music of the water over the stones relaxed my nerves, although why I had need of such a thing I find it difficult to understand, unless I was really upset by Racky's not having come home to lunch. But if that were true it would be absurd, and, moreover, dangerous,—just the sort of the thing the parent of an adolescent has to beware of and fight against, unless he is indifferent to the prospect of losing the trust and affection of his offspring permanently. Racky must stay out whenever he likes, with whom he likes, and for as long as he likes, and I must not think twice about it, much less mention it to him, or in any way give the impression of prying. Lack of confidence on the part of a parent is the one unforgivable sin.

Although we still take our morning dip together on arising, it is three weeks since we have been for an early spin. One morning I found that Racky had jumped onto his bicycle in his wet trunks while I was still swimming, and gone by himself, and since

then there has been an unspoken agreement between us that such is to be the procedure; he will go alone. Perhaps I held him back; he likes to ride so fast.

Young Peter, the smiling gardener from Saint Ives Cove, is Racky's special friend. It is amusing to see them together among the bushes, over an ant-hill or rushing about trying to catch a lizard, almost of an age the two, yet so disparate,—Racky with his tan skin looking almost white in contrast to the glistening black of the other. Today I know I shall be alone for lunch, since it is Peter's day off. On such days they usually go together on their bicycles into Saint Ives Cove, where Peter keeps a small rowboat. They fish along the coast there, but they have never returned with anything so far.

Meanwhile I am here alone, sitting on the rocks in the sun, from time to time climbing down to cool myself in the water, always conscious of the house behind me under the high palms, like a large glass boat filled with orchids and lilies. The servants are clean and quiet, and the work seems to be accomplished almost automatically. The good, black servants are another blessing of the islands; the British, born here in this paradise, have no conception of how fortunate they are. In fact, they do nothing but complain. One must have lived in the United States to appreciate the wonder of this place. Still, even here ideas are changing each day. Soon the people will decide that they want their land to be a part of today's monstrous world, and once that happens, it will be all over. As soon as you have that desire, you are infected with the deadly virus, and you begin to show the symptoms of the disease. You live in terms of time and money, and you think in terms of society and progress. Then all that is left for you is to kill the other people who think the same way, along with a good many of those who do not, since that is the final manifestation of the malady. Here for the moment at any rate, one has a feeling of staticity;—existence ceases to be like those last few seconds in the hour-glass when what is left of the sand suddenly begins to rush through to the bottom all at once. For the moment, it seems suspended. And if it seems, it is. Each wave at my feet, each bird-call in the forest at my back, does *not* carry me one step nearer the final disaster. The disaster is certain, but it will suddenly have happened, that is all. Until then, time stays still.

* * *

I am upset by a letter in this morning's mail: the Royal Bank of Canada requests that I call in person at its central office to sign the deposit slips and other papers for a sum that was cabled from the bank in Boston. Since the central office is on the other side of the island, fifty miles away, I shall have to spend the night over there and return the following day. There is no point in taking Racky along. The sight of "civilization" might awaken a longing for it in him; one never knows. I am sure it would have in me when I was his age. And if that should once start, he would merely be unhappy, since there is nothing for him but to stay here with me, at least for the next two years, when I hope to renew the lease, or, if things in New York pick up, buy the place. I am sending word by Isiah when he goes home into Orange Walk this evening, to have the McCoigh car call for me at seven thirty tomorrow morning. It is an enormous old open Packard, and Isiah can save the walk out to work here by piling his bicycle into the back and riding with McCoigh.

* * *

The trip across the island was beautiful, and would have been highly enjoyable if my imagination had not played me a strange trick at the very outset. We stopped in Orange Walk for gasoline, and while that was being seen to, I got out and went to the corner store for some cigarettes. Since it was not yet eight o'clock, the store was still closed, and I hurried up the side street to the other little shop which I thought might be open. It was, and I bought my cigarettes. On the way back to the corner I noticed a large black woman leaning with her arms on the gate in front of her tiny house, staring into the street. As I passed by her, she looked straight into my face and said something with the strange accent of the island. It was said in what seemed an unfriendly tone, and ostensibly was directed at me, but I had no notion what it was. I got back into the car and the driver started it. The sound of the words had stayed in my head, however, as a bright shape outlined by darkness is likely to stay in the mind's eye, in such a way that when one shuts one's eyes one can see the exact contour of the shape. The car was already roaring up the hill toward the overland road when I suddenly reheard the very words. And they were: "Keep your boy at home, mahn." I sat perfectly rigid for a moment as the open countryside rushed past. Why should I think she had said that? Immediately I decided that I was giving an arbitrary sense to a phrase I could not have under-

stood even if I had been paying strict attention. And then I wondered why my subconscious should have chosen that sense, since now that I whispered the words over to myself they failed to connect with any anxiety to which my mind might have been disposed. Actually I have never given a thought to Racky's wanderings about Orange Walk. I can find no such preoccupation no matter how I put the question to myself. Then, could she really have said those words? All the way through the mountains I pondered the question, even though it was obviously a waste of energy. And soon I could no longer hear the sound of her voice in my memory. I had played the record over too many times, and worn it out.

Here in the hotel a gala dance is in progress. The abominable orchestra, comprising two saxophones and one sour violin, is playing directly under my window in the garden, and the serious-looking couples slide about on the waxed concrete floor of the terrace, in the light of strings of paper lanterns. I suppose it is meant to look Japanese.

At this moment I wonder what Racky is doing there in the house with only Peter and Ernest the watchman to keep him company. I wonder if he is asleep. The house, which I am accustomed to think of as smiling and benevolent in its airiness, could just as well be in the most sinister and remote regions of the globe, now that I am here. Sitting here with the absurd orchestra bleating downstairs, I picture it to myself, and it strikes me as terribly vulnerable in its isolation. In my mind's eye I see the moonlit point with its tall palms waving restlessly in the wind, its dark cliffs licked by the waves below. Suddenly, although I struggle against the sensation, I am inexpressibly glad to be away from the house, helpless there, far on its point of land, in the silence of the night. Then I remember that the night is seldom silent. There is the loud sea at the base of the rocks, the droning of the thousands of insects, the occasional cries of the night birds,—all the familiar noises that make sleep so sound. And Racky is there surrounded by them as usual, not even hearing them. But I feel profoundly guilty for having left him, unutterably tender and sad at the thought of him, lying there alone in the house with the two Negroes the only human beings within miles. If I keep thinking of Cold Point I shall be more and more nervous.

I am not going to bed yet. They are all screaming with laughter down there, the idiots; I could never sleep anyway. The

bar is still open. Fortunately it is on the street side of the hotel. For once I need a few drinks.

* * *

Much later, but I feel no better; I may be a little drunk. The dance is over and it is quiet in the garden, but the room is too hot.

* * *

As I was falling asleep last night, all dressed, and with the overhead light shining sordidly in my face, I heard the black woman's voice again, more clearly even than I did in the car yesterday. For some reason this morning there is no doubt in my mind that the words I heard are the words she said. I accept that and go on from there. Suppose she did tell me to keep Racky home. It could only mean that she, or someone else in Orange Walk, has had a childish altercation with him; although I must say it is hard to conceive of Racky's entering into any sort of argument or feud with those people. To set my mind at rest, (for I do seem to be taking the whole thing with a great seriousness) I am going to stop in the village this afternoon before going home, and try to see the woman. I am extremely curious to know what she could have meant.

* * *

I had not been conscious until this evening when I came back to Cold Point how powerful they are, all those physical elements that go to make up its atmosphere: the sea and wind-sounds that isolate the house from the road, the brilliancy of the water, sky and sun, the bright colors and strong odors of the flowers, the feeling of space both outside and within the house. One naturally accepts these things when one is living here. This afternoon when I returned I was conscious of them all over again, of their existence and their strength. All of them together are like a powerful drug; coming back made me feel as though I had been disintoxicated and were returning to the scene of my former indulgences. Now at eleven it is as if I had never been absent an hour. Everything is the same as always, even to the dry palm branch that scrapes against the window screen by my night table. And indeed, it is only thirty-six hours since I was here; but I always expect my absence from a place to bring about irremediable changes.

Strangely enough, now that I think of it, I feel that something *has* changed since I left yesterday morning, and that is the general attitude of the servants,—their collective aura, so to speak. I noticed that difference immediately upon arriving back, but was unable to define it. Now I see it clearly. The network of common understanding which slowly spreads itself through a well-run household has been destroyed. Each person is by himself now. No unfriendliness, however, that I can see. They all behave with the utmost courtesy, excepting possibly Peter, who struck me as looking unaccustomedly glum when I encountered him in the kitchen after dinner. I meant to ask Racky if he had noticed it, but I forgot and he went to bed early.

In Orange Walk I made a brief stop on the pretext to McCoigh that I wanted to see the seamstress in the side street. I walked up and back in front of the house where I had seen the woman, but there was no sign of anyone.

As for my absence, Racky seems to have been perfectly content, having spent most of the day swimming off the rocks below the terrace. The insect sounds are at their height now, the breeze is cooler than usual, and I shall take advantage of these favorable conditions to get a good long night's rest.

* * *

Today has been one of the most difficult days of my life. I arose early, we had breakfast at the regular time, and Racky went off in the direction of Saint Ives Cove. I lay in the sun on the terrace for a while, listening to the noises of the household regime. Peter was all over the property, collecting dead leaves and fallen blossoms in a huge basket and carrying them off to the compost heap. He appeared to be in an even fouler humor than last night. When he came near to me at one point on his way to another part of the garden I called to him. He set the basket down and stood looking at me; then he walked across the grass toward me slowly,—reluctantly, it seemed to me.

"Peter, is everything all right with you?"

"Yes, sir."

"No trouble at home?"

"Oh, no, sir."

"Good."

"Yes, sir."

He went back to his work. But his face belied his words. Not only did he seem to be in a decidedly unpleasant temper; out here

in the sunlight he looked positively ill. However, it was not my concern, if he refused to admit it.

When the heavy heat of the sun reached the unbearable point for me, I got out of my chair and went down the side of the cliff along the series of steps cut there into the rock. A level platform is below, and a diving board, for the water is deep. At each side, the rocks spread out and the waves break over them, but by the platform the wall of rock is vertical and the water merely hits against it below the springboard. The place is a tiny amphitheatre, quite cut off in sound and sight from the house. There too I like to lie in the sun; when I climb out of the water I often remove my trunks and lie stark naked on the springboard. I regularly make fun of Racky because he is embarrassed to do the same. Occasionally he will do it, but never without being coaxed. I was spread out there without a stitch on, being lulled by the slapping of the water, when an unfamiliar voice very close to me said: "Mister Norton?"

I jumped with nervousness, nearly fell off the springboard, and sat up, reaching at the same time, but in vain, for my trunks, which were lying on the rock practically at the feet of a middle-aged mulatto gentleman. He was in a white duck suit, and wore a high collar with a black tie, and it seemed to me that he was eyeing me with a certain degree of horror.

My next reaction was one of anger at being trespassed upon in this way. I rose and got the trunks, however, donning them calmly and saying nothing more meaningful than: "I didn't hear you come down the steps."

"Shall we go up?" said my caller. As he led the way, I had a definite premonition that he was here on an unpleasant errand. On the terrace we sat down, and he offered me an American cigarette which I did not accept.

"This is a delightful spot," he said, glancing out to sea and then at the end of his cigarette, which was only partially aglow. He puffed at it.

I said "Yes," waiting for him to go on; presently he did.

"I am from the constabulary of this parish. The police, you see." And seeing my face, "This is a friendly call. But still it must be taken as a warning, Mister Norton. It is very serious. If anyone else comes to you about this it will mean trouble for you, heavy trouble. That's why I want to see you privately this way and warn you personally. You see."

I could not believe I was hearing his words. At length I said faintly: "But what about?"

"This is not an official call. You must not be upset. I have taken it upon myself to speak to you because I want to save you deep trouble."

"But I *am* upset!" I cried, finding my voice at last. "How can I help being upset, when I don't know what you're talking about?"

He moved his chair close to mine, and spoke in a very low voice.

"I have waited until the young man was away from the house so we could talk in private. You see, it is about him."

Somehow that did not surprise me. I nodded.

"I will tell you very briefly. The people here are simple country folk. They make trouble easily. Right now they are all talking about the young man you have living here with you. He is your son, I hear." His inflection here was sceptical.

"Certainly he's my son."

His expression did not change, but his voice grew indignant. "Whoever he is, that is a bad young man."

"What do you mean?" I cried, but he cut in hotly: "He may be your son; he may not be. I don't care who he is. That is not my affair. But he is bad through and through. We don't have such things going on here, sir. The people in Orange Walk and Saint Ives Cove are very cross now. You don't know what these folk do when they are aroused."

I thought it my turn to interrupt. "Please tell me why you say my son is bad. What has he done?" Perhaps the earnestness in my voice reached him, for his face assumed a gentler aspect. He leaned still closer to me and almost whispered.

"He has no shame. He does what he pleases with all the young boys, and the men too, and gives them a shilling so they won't tell about it. But they talk. Of course they talk. Every man for twenty miles up and down the coast knows about it. And the women too, they know about it." There was a silence.

I had felt myself preparing to get to my feet for the last few seconds because I wanted to go into my room and be alone, to get away from that scandalized stage whisper. I think I mumbled "Good morning" or "Thank you," as I turned away and began walking toward the house. But he was still beside me, still whispering like an eager conspirator into my ear: "Keep him home, Mister Norton. Or send him away to school, if he is your son. But make him stay out of these towns. For his own sake."

I shook hands with him and went in to lie on my bed. From there I heard his car door slam, heard him drive off. I was pain-

fully trying to formulate an opening sentence to use in speaking to Racky about this, feeling that the opening sentence would define my stand. The attempt was merely a sort of therapeutic action, to avoid thinking about the thing itself. Every attitude seemed impossible. There was no way to broach the subject. I suddenly realized that I should never be able to speak to him directly about it. With the advent of this news he had become another person,—an adult, mysterious and formidable. To be sure, it did occur to me that the mulatto's story might not be true, but automatically I rejected the doubt. It was as if I wanted to believe it, almost as if I had already known it, and he had merely confirmed it.

Racky returned at midday, panting and grinning. The inevitable comb appeared and was used on the sweaty, unruly locks. Sitting down to lunch he exclaimed: "Gosh! Did I find a swell beach this morning! But what a job to get to it!" I tried to look unconcerned as I met his gaze; it was as if our positions had been reversed, and I were hoping to stem his rebuke. He prattled on about thorns and vines and his machete. Throughout the meal I kept telling myself: "Now is the moment. You must say something." But all I said was: "More salad? Or do you want dessert now?" So the lunch passed and nothing happened. After I had finished my coffee I went into my bedroom and looked at myself in the large mirror. I saw my eyes trying to give their reflected brothers a little courage. As I stood there I heard a commotion in the other wing of the house: voices, bumpings, the sound of a scuffle. Above the noise came Gloria's sharp voice, imperious and excited: "No, mahn! Don't strike him!" And louder: "Peter, mahn, no!"

I went quickly toward the kitchen, where the trouble seemed to be, but on the way I was run into by Racky, who staggered into the hallway with his hands in front of his face.

"What is it, Racky?" I cried.

He pushed past me into the living room without moving his hands away from his face; I turned and followed him. From there he went into his own room, leaving the door open behind him. I heard him in his bathroom running the water. I was undecided what to do. Suddenly Peter appeared in the hall doorway, his hat in his hand. When he raised his head, I was surprised to see that his cheek was bleeding. In his eyes was a strange, confused expression of transient fear and deep hostility. He looked down again.

"May I please talk with you, sir?"

"What was all the racket? What's been happening?"

"May I talk with you outside, sir?" He said it doggedly, still not looking up.

In view of the circumstances, I humored him. We walked slowly up the cinder road to the main highway, across the bridge, and through the forest while he told me his story. I said nothing.

At the end he said: "I never wanted to, sir, even the first time, but after the first time I was afraid, and Mister Racky was after me every day."

I stood still, and finally said: "If you had only told me this the first time it happened, it would have been much better for everyone."

He turned his hat in his hands, studying it intently. "Yes, sir. But I didn't know what everyone was saying about him in Orange Walk until today. You know I always go to the beach at Saint Ives Cove with Mister Racky on my free days. If I had known what they were all saying I wouldn't have been afraid, sir. And I wanted to keep on working here. I needed the money." Then he repeated what he had already said three times. "Mister Racky said you'd see about it that I was put in the jail. I'm a year older than Mister Racky, sir."

"I know, I know," I said impatiently; and deciding that severity was what Peter expected of me at this point I added: "You had better get your things together and go home. You can't work here any longer, you know."

The hostility in his face assumed terrifying proportions as he said: "If you killed me I would not work at Cold Point, sir."

I turned and walked briskly back to the house, leaving him standing there in the road. It seems he returned at dusk a little while ago, and got his belongings.

In his room Racky was reading. He had stuck some adhesive tape on his chin and over his cheekbone.

"I've dismissed Peter," I announced. "He hit you, didn't he?"

He glanced up. His left eye was swollen, but not yet black.

"He sure did. But I landed one, too. And I guess I deserved it anyway."

I rested against the table. "Why?" I asked nonchalantly.

"Oh, I had something on him from a long time back that he was afraid I'd tell you."

"And just now you threatened to tell me?"

"Oh, no! He said he was going to quit the job here, and I kidded him about being yellow."

"Why did he want to quit? I thought he liked the job."

"Well, he did, I guess, but he didn't like me." Racky's candid gaze betrayed a shade of pique. I still leaned against the table.

I persisted. "But I thought you two got on fine together. You seemed to."

"Nah. He was just scared of losing his job. I had something on him. He was a good guy, though; I liked him all right." He paused. "Has he gone yet?" A strange quaver crept into his voice as he said the last words, and I understood for the first time Racky's heretofore impeccable histrionics were not quite equal to the occasion. He was very much upset at losing Peter.

"Yes, he's gone," I said shortly. He's not coming back, either." And as Racky, hearing the unaccustomed inflection in my voice, looked up at me suddenly with faint astonishment in his young eyes, I realized that this was the moment to press on, to say: "What did you have on him?" But as if he had arrived at the same spot in my mind a fraction of a second earlier, he proceeded to snatch away my advantage by jumping up, bursting into loud song, and pulling off all his clothes simultaneously. As he stood before me naked, singing at the top of his lungs, and stepped into his swimming trunks, I was conscious that again I should be incapable of saying to him what I must say.

He was in and out of the house all afternoon: some of the time he read in his room, and most of the time he was down on the diving board. It is strange behavior for him; if I could only know what is in his mind. As evening approached, my problem took on a purely obsessive character. I walked to and fro in my room, always pausing at one end to look out the window over the sea, and at the other end to glance at my face in the mirror. As if that could help me! Then I took a drink. And another. I thought I might be able to do it at dinner, when I felt fortified by the whiskey. But no. Soon he will have gone to bed. It is not that I expect to confront him with any accusations. That I know I never can do. But I must find a way to keep him from his wanderings, and I must offer a reason to give him, so that he will never suspect that I know.

* * *

We fear for the future of our offspring. It is ludicrous, but only a little more palpably so than anything else in life. A length of time has passed; days which I am content to have known, even if now they are over. I think that this period was what I had always been waiting for life to offer, the recompense I had un-

consciously but firmly expected, in return for having been held so closely in the grip of existence all these years.

That evening seems long ago only because I have recalled its details so many times that they have taken on the color of legend. Actually my problem already had been solved for me then, but I did not know it. Because I could not perceive the pattern, I foolishly imagined that I must cudgel my brains to find the right words with which to approach Racky. But it was he who came to me. That same evening, as I was about to go out for a solitary stroll which I thought might help me hit upon a formula, he appeared at my door.

"Going for a walk?" he asked, seeing the stick in my hand.

The prospect of making an exit immediately after speaking with him made things seem simpler. "Yes," I said, "but I'd like to have a word with you first."

"Sure, what?" I did not look at him because I did not want to see the watchful light I was sure was playing in his eyes at this moment. As I spoke I tapped with my stick along the designs made by the tiles in the floor. "Racky, would you like to go back to school?"

"Are you kidding? You know I hate school."

I glanced up at him. "No, I'm not kidding. Don't look so horrified. You'd probably enjoy being with a bunch of fellows your own age." (That was not one of the arguments I had meant to use.)

"I might like to be with guys my own age, but I don't want to have to be in school to do it. I've had school enough."

I went to the door and said lamely: "I thought I'd get your reactions."

He laughed. "No, thanks."

"That doesn't mean you're not going," I said over my shoulder as I went out.

On my walk I pounded the highway's asphalt with my stick, stood on the bridge having dramatic visions which involved such eventualities as our moving back to the States, Racky's having had a bad spill on his bicycle and being paralyzed for some months, and even the possibility of my letting events take their course, which would doubtless mean my having to visit him now and then in the governmental prison with gifts of food, if it meant nothing more tragic and violent. "But none of these things will happen," I said to myself, and I knew I was wasting precious time; he must not return to Orange Walk tomorrow.

I went back toward the point at a snail's pace. There was no moon and very little breeze. As I approached the house, trying to tread lightly on the cinders so as not to awaken the watchful Ernest and having to explain to him that it was only I, I saw that there were no lights in Racky's room. The house was dark save for the dim lamp on my night table. Instead of going in, I skirted the entire building, colliding with bushes and getting my face sticky with spiderwebs, and went to sit a while on the terrace where there seemed to be a breath of air. The sound of the sea was far out at the reef, where the breakers sighed. Here below, there were only slight watery chugs and gurgles now and then. It was unusually low tide. I smoked three cigarettes mechanically, having ceased even to think, and then, my mouth tasting bitter from the smoke, I went inside.

My room was airless. I flung my clothes onto a chair and looked at the night table to see if the carafe of water was there. Then my mouth opened. The top sheet of my bed had been stripped back to the foot. There on the far side of the bed, dark against the whiteness of the lower sheet, lay Racky asleep on his side, and naked.

I stood looking at him for a long time, probably holding my breath, for I remember feeling a little dizzy at one point. I was whispering to myself, as my eyes followed the curve of his arm, shoulder, back, thigh, leg: "A child. A child." Destiny, when one perceives it clearly from very near, has no qualities at all. The recognition of it and the consciousness of the vision's clarity leave no room on the mind's horizon. Finally I turned off the light and softly lay down. The night was absolutely black.

He lay perfectly quiet until dawn. I shall never know whether or not he was really asleep all that time. Of course he couldn't have been, and yet he lay so still. Warm and firm, but still as death. The darkness and silence were heavy around us. As the birds began to sing, I sank into a soft, enveloping slumber; when I awoke in the sunlight later, he was gone.

I found him down by the water, cavorting alone on the springboard; for the first time he had discarded his trunks without my suggesting it. All day we stayed together around the terrace and on the rocks, talking, swimming, reading, and just lying flat in the hot sun. Nor did he return to his room when night came. Instead, after the servants were asleep, we brought three bottles of champagne in and set the pail on the night table.

Thus it came about that I was able to touch on the delicate subject that still preoccupied me, and profiting by the new under-

standing between us, I made my request in the easiest, most natural fashion.

"Racky, would you do me a tremendous favor if I asked you?"

He lay on his back, his hands beneath his head. It seemed to me his regard was circumspect, wanting in candor.

"I guess so," he said. "What is it?"

"Will you stay around the house for a few days,—a week, say? Just to please me? We can take some rides together, as far as you like. Would you do that for me?"

"Sure thing," he said, smiling.

I was temporizing, but I was desperate.

Perhaps a week later,—(it is only when one is not fully happy that one is meticulous about time, so that it may have been more or less)—we were having breakfast. Isiah stood by, in the shade, waiting to pour us more coffee.

"I noticed you had a letter from Uncle Charley the other day," said Racky. "Don't you think we ought to invite him down?"

My heart began to beat with great force.

"Here? He'd hate it here," I said casually. "Besides, there's no room. Where would he sleep?" Even as I heard myself saying the words, I knew they were the wrong ones, that I was not really participating in the conversation. Again I felt the fascination of complete helplessness that comes when one is suddenly a conscious onlooker at the shaping of one's fate.

"In my room," said Racky. "It's empty."

I could see more of the pattern at that moment than I had ever suspected existed. "Nonsense," I said. "This is not the sort of place for Uncle Charley."

Racky appeared to be hitting on an excellent idea. "Maybe if I wrote and invited him," he suggested, motioning to Isiah for more coffee.

"Nonsense," I said again, watching still more of the pattern reveal itself, like a photographic print becoming constantly clearer in a tray of developing solution.

Isiah filled Racky's cup and returned to the shade. Racky drank slowly, pretending to be savoring the coffee.

"Well, it won't do any harm to try. He'd appreciate the invitation," he said speculatively.

For some reason, at this juncture I knew what to say, and as I said it, I knew what I was going to do.

"I thought we might fly over to Havana for a few days next week."

He looked guardedly interested, and then he broke into a wide grin. "Swell!" he cried. "Why wait till next week?"

* * *

The next morning the servants called "Goodbye" to us as we drove up the cinder road in the McCoigh car. We took off from the airport at six that evening. Racky was in high spirits; he kept the stewardess engaged in conversation all the way to Camaguey.

He was delighted also with Havana. Sitting in the bar at the Nacional, we continued to discuss the possibility of having C. pay us a visit at the island. It was not without difficulty that I eventually managed to persuade Racky that writing him would be inadvisable.

We decided to look for an apartment right there in Vedado for Racky. He did not seem to want to come back here to Cold Point. We also decided that living in Havana he would need a larger income than I. I am already having the greater part of Hope's estate transferred to his name in the form of a trust fund which I shall administer until he is of age. It was his mother's money, after all.

We bought a new convertible, and he drove me out to Rancho Boyeros in it when I took my plane. A Cuban named Claudio with very white teeth, whom Racky had met in the pool that morning, sat between us.

We were waiting in front of the landing field. An official finally unhooked the chain to let the passengers through. "If you get fed up, come to Havana," said Racky, pinching my arm.

The two of them stood together behind the rope, waving to me, their shirts flapping in the wind as the plane started to move.

There is a saying here in the island: "Tears don't show in the rain." Life is profoundly peaceful here, but already I am back to thinking of the bombs, and wondering why the world so much resents that form of extinction. Surely it is not a personal fear; individual death is inevitable and unpredictable in any case. I think I keep the bombs in mind as a promise of deliverance from my little sadnesses! It may be that they are the rain which I like to think will come, so that the tears will be unnoticeable. Figurative tears, of course. I am perfectly happy here in reality, because I still believe that nothing very drastic is likely to befall this part of the island in the near future.

CHRISTMAS DAY

Frances Cotton

IT WAS FOGGY IN THE ROOM, foggy outside, cold and damp and dark. The room swam slowly into focus, a pale square of light from the window gradually illuminated the hump of a chair next to the bed; the bureau top . . . littered . . . his wallet; change; spilled pipe tobacco, brushes, comb, opened powder jar. Six a. m. Cold, cold, cold. The cold got into the bones of this house. More cold air came in through the half open window. Fresh air fiend. She looked over at her husband, sleeping, and glared. Why couldn't he keep it shut, once in a while? Just for her . . . get enough fresh air through the cracks, this weather. What'll we do when the baby gets here? Can't argue with him. Stubborn. Why the hell does he walk all over me? Why do I let him? He's always on top of me. The thought came, half articulate, I hate him. No, no. Yes, go on, say it. I can't, I can't. Besides, it wouldn't make any impression, he knows it. Mule, mule. Can't hurt him. I've got nothing to hit back with.

She shifted, sniffed. Ooh . . . have to go. Well, get up.

She looked down at her expanding front. Nice, round, fat. Hold it gently. Feels like it's going to fall out any minute. Like ripe fruit. Mmm, so heavy there on the bottom.

No heaves today? It's been so quiet. Getting ready. God, when's it coming, when? Any day now. . . I'm afraid. I want it, I don't want it. Pushing, squeezing, tearing its way out. Crushing me inside? The head, so big, will the head be nice and round, or will the bones flatten it, it's so low. Can I push hard enough? Will I scream? God, don't let me scream.

— Gee, I'm wet down below. What? Look at your pajamas. White stuff. Oozing. Is it. . . Is it?

Guess it is.

Well . . . sigh. So this is it. Well, it's not so bad. No pain. There's nothing to it. Relax. Probably take three days. First babies always work up slow. Oh, God, I hope I'm not in labor too long. If it's thirty-six hours, how can I stand it?

Let's see . . . membranes broken. Infection. The baby's unprotected. I'll have to get to the hospital right away. Should I call the doctor? No, you dope, too early. You've got hours yet.

Wake him up.

She looked at her sleeping husband.

Oh God, if he doesn't wake up. . . "Ben." A whisper came out.

"Huh?" Oh, good. Easy, don't scare him. Be matter of fact. "My membrane's broke and I better go to the hospital. It's oozing out. . ."

"HMMMM?" He sat up, looking worried, drew her in. Warm Oooh. . . Funny, I want him. A fine time. Besides, I'm so big it would be like climbing mountains.

"You having any pains?"

"No, but. . ." Oh, the dope. That doesn't make any difference. He doesn't know. The infection. . . Well, tell him. Slowly.

"See, I could get infected very easily now, there's nothing there to prevent it, the bag's broken it could wash right up. So they tell you to go to the hospital as soon as it breaks. . ."

He was up, slipping on an undershirt and his shorts, the baggy ones with moth holes in them. Ventilated shorts. Doesn't he have any other ones in the drawer? I did the wash. He was shivering too. Cold. Shame to get him up. "You don't have to come with me."

He looked back at her, sitting on the bed. "How are you?"

"Okay."

"Well, if you aren't having any pains. . ." That unwilling smile, creeping out. Is he going to get something out of me? Oh, the son of a bitch. What makes me have to smile too? "What?"

"Why don't you get back into bed awhile. Take a nap. It's early."

Nap!

Mmmm. . . Bed. Warm.

Won't get up, won't even take his wife in labor to the hospital. What's he so calm about? Doesn't he care?

Well. . . It can't hurt me if I just get into bed and lie still. . .

Feels good. A good thing he keeps his head, maybe.

God, what would I do without him? I need him.

Lie still. Nice and warm. . . It'll be warmer when you wake up. They'll have the heat on.

When she woke up, an hour later, more gray light had filtered in. The jagged crack in the top of the window shade showed pinkish white. There was a fuzzy taste in her mouth; a drugged, languorous feeling. What time is it? Time. . . She peered at the window. The mound next to her wiggled. Swiped all the blankets again. Sprawl, sprawl. Who said when you get married you give up sleeping diagonally? God knows he never would. And the size of me, too. Wonder I could fit. I'm hungry. They say you shouldn't eat when you're in labor. Wonder if I could eat a little breakfast . . . an egg, maybe. Oh, he's awake!

He propped himself on an elbow. "Well, I see you're still with us."

"Oh, sure."

"Got any pains?"

"Nope, not yet." When, God damn it? I want to get started.

"How's about . . . breakfast?" Sounds just like Sunday morning. So lazy. If he expects *me* to. . .

"Do you think you could get it, or. . ." Well! First time he ever *asked*. . . After all. . . I feel perfectly all right. Might as well. Make it seem more like any other day.

"Sure, I guess so."

"We'll have boiled eggs." On a holiday? We always have fried or. . . But I guess I'd rather have boiled this morning. Less trouble.

She sighed and got up, wound her housecoat around her, knotted the belt tight, combed her hair. Good, now I feel more dressed. This room, *look* at this room. So dark and tumbled and squalid in the morning, looks like a cell. A tenement.

In the kitchen, he helped her, filling pots with water, setting the table.

Eight o'clock. I'll have time to get through breakfast anyway. I still don't hurt. Just those little twinges, once in a while. Like my period—Oh, I can stand it!

Wait. Wait awhile. Remember Minnie said, "Oh, those first pains, they're a joke!"

I wonder what it looks like. They wouldn't even tell me how the X-ray looked. Mean. He *must* be normal. He? Is it a he? It kicked like a he. I want a boy. He said we'd love it whatever it is. But I *want* a son, my first one, my baby. Maybe because I'd be jealous of a girl. He'd love it too much. I mustn't think that. Remember how mad he got, that time?

But a girl would be nice. Easy to handle. A boy would be so different, wild, like his family. I never will understand them . . . that crazy streak . . . like wild animals.

What do I want? I don't know. Too complicated. I can't think. Like a rat maze. Guess it doesn't make any difference.

She looked at the clock, then down at the table. That cloth's all spotted. Eggy stuff sticks so . . . hate to wash those plates. Spilled the coffee in the saucer again. *Why* does he spill when he pours?

What's that in the pit of my stomach? A pain? Well, it's a nice comfortable little pain.

Oh, baby. Baby. Hurry up. Hurry up. Get a move on and get out. I can't wait.

"You all through?"

"Uh huh."

Now we'll go. . .

"We might as well do the dishes." So slow. Fussy house-keeper, damn him. Like his mother. Fuss, fuss, fuss over nothing. Oh, well. Get it cleaned up. It's Christmas. Hate to leave a job in the middle. Makes you feel frayed, kind of. Anyway, I'll have enough doing nothing, after I get there.

"Okay, let's."

"I'll wash 'em and you wipe 'em."

Now, that's nice of him, for once. I hate washing dishes. Oh God, like that time I was sick, in the second month. Scraping the plates. He'd never do it for me when I really needed it. So afraid I'd take advantage. . .

I feel fine now. Not as bad as then. I'm getting somewhere now. I'm doing something.

"We might as well . . . make the bed."

Oh God that's too much . . . well. . . don't start an argument. "Okay." You never know with him. Slap me in the face when I was so sick I couldn't stand up straight. I'll never know just why . . . hate him too much to know. So funny sometimes. Don't think about it. Make you sick.

We can pull the shades up, now the bed's done. Good. Room looks civilized now. One thing I hate in a room is an unmade bed. Makes it look like a cathouse.

"You know what?" He paused at the door, lighting his pipe. Now what, for God's sake?

"I feel an awful good movement coming on."

Oh, my God.

Well . . . if he's got to, he's got to, I suppose.

I wonder how long it'll be after we get there. Hours, I guess. Sitting. Waiting. They take you in the labor room after a while. After it gets bad. Screaming, that is. At least I'll be alone then. I can yell all I want; nobody'll hear me.

My legs are starting to cramp up a little bit. Like last night. That was funny. After that Chinese meal, my legs so stiff he had to haul me along over the mud puddles. He had to say something. "What's the matter? Gimpy?" Couldn't just take me home and keep quiet.

Why does he make me wait so long? Sometimes I hate his guts. Why do I stay with him? I couldn't go now. The baby. And that damn ignominious feeling, I need a piece of ass once in a while. A legal piece of ass and a meal ticket. Reason most women stay with their husbands, I guess.

That time I tried to go away. I was six months along, but I was going, all right. "If you slap me again I'll leave you." Then he came and knocked me straight across the bed. And I had to stay too. No money in my bag. If the bed hadn't been there. . . He took damn good care it was there, the son of a bitch. Never give me a good excuse to hit him back. That's the worst of it.

I hate him because I can't ever hit him back.

Here he comes. About time. . . "I'll call a taxi now, huh?"

He paused. "Well . . . could you go by yourself in a taxi?"

"Sure."

"Want me to come with you?"

Damn it, I want him to be there. "Sure, I'd like to have you come with me."

"Well . . . I tell you what, would you rather go in a taxi, by yourself, or a street car, with me?"

Street car!

Now why the. . .

Money.

My God, he can't even take a taxi now. A man who won't take his wife to the hospital in a taxi. . .

The son of a bitch. And I want him along, I want him near me. I even want to go in a street car with him. How's it go? . . . "Two is better than one, for two have heat. . ." Better than nothing, I guess.

"Okay, let's go in a street car." If he won't go any other way. "There's loads of time." God damn it. Just *loads* of time. Four hours and my pains aren't getting any harder. It'll be all night at this rate.

He picked up her bag, took a final look around. Just like any other day. The bed smooth, the rug only a little wrinkled, the bureau top picked up. She shut the door after them, tried it. They went downstairs.

The wind had stopped, the snow was falling in little thick flakes. Cozy, like a Christmas card. Gentle, soft, cool air. A sweet day, like a picture in a frame. She said, "I'm glad there's snow."

He nodded, guiding her across the street. "Christmas, snow, and baby."

"It'll be something to tell him about."

She felt quite happy now. It was like a dream. Incredible. Me, having a baby. . . Hope to God we don't have to run for a street car. Thank goodness it isn't icy out. If I fell, now. . .

The streetcar rattled up, and they got in. He waved to a friend across the aisle, a boy with a pretty girl.

She's got that blonde, finished look I hate, I couldn't ever get it if it took me a lifetime. I'll always be a dirty faced kid with my pants falling down.

They came over; introductions. . . "How are you?" the boy asked. "Fine," she smiled. I'm going into labor, otherwise I'm fine. The doctor had said, last week, "Well, you ought to go into labor about next Thursday." Go into labor. Me? Funny it should be such a shock. I've been pregnant long enough.

The car jerked, stopped. Where are we? Oh, only down at Harvard Square. The car slid into the tunnel. Dark, dark. Closing in all around me. Like going into prison. No way out. Like the walls of the vagina, maybe. The cervix, all hard bone. The head moving along the walls, groping, bloody . . . the bones moving in, crushing, crushing. Killing it. Or will it kill me? Hush, hush. Don't think. It doesn't make any sense. When the baby gets out it'll be better.

Out. I want to get out. Out of what? Keep thinking, keep going, maybe you'll find it. What? That thing I want to get away from. Keep looking. I can't, I won't, I can't touch it. I'm afraid. Yes, I said it. I got that far. I admit I'm afraid.

Where are we now? Park Street.

Look at those people looking at the suitcase. This is one morning I won't have to stand up. Damn fool, taking a streetcar. Conspicuous. He would. No shame. Joke on them though. Look at them. Popeyed. Backing away from the door. Afraid they might joggle the kid loose I suppose. Scare 'em to death if anything happened. More'n it would me. I'd be in the middle of it. No time to be scared then.

The sun's coming out now. This is a nice cosy train. Rocking's good for me, like he said. Sometimes he's right, the son of a bitch.

Where. . . We're here. Now we've got to get to the hospital. My bag, has he got my bag?

"Here we are." He was helping her out. So solicitous of me all of a sudden. He always acts nice in public. Almost makes me feel nice. Except that first time he slapped me, in the middle of the street. He wasn't thinking then. Doesn't worry about appearances much anyway. He really doesn't. God, I'll never understand him. What did I marry? What did I marry him for? Oh, I love him, I suppose.

There it is, at the top of the hill. New England Hospital. Sweet, so smug, like a college campus. God how I hated college. They pushed me out of there fast enough. Maybe I pushed myself out. Lucky I'm learning. You can build things from the bottom up. Learning a little bit. Slowly.

Oh I'm tired. Can I get up that hill?

He turned toward the biggest of the cluster of three buildings.

"No," she said. "In here. The admitting office."

"You sure?"

Damn him. "Yes, I'm sure. It's where I went when I had the X-ray."

She fought with the heavy door. He pushed it open, from behind her. Decorum, quiet corridors, green plants. Institution. Well disguised, but an institution. A sign said, *Admitting Office*. Behind a small, light wood desk a woman in a nurse's uniform. Not just a nurse. A woman in a nurse's uniform. Nice eyes. She knew her stuff. Kind, tired, shrewd.

He paused in the doorway.

Oh. Going to let me do the talking for once?

Tell her.

"I'm Mrs. Wolf. Remember, I came for X-rays, last week?"

"Oh yes, Mrs. Wolf. Can you sit a minute, or shall I have your husband fill out the forms?"

Can you sit a minute. Somebody who knows what I'm up against. Makes a difference.

Well, I haven't any pains yet.

"Sure I can."

He moved behind her. "I thought you wanted to go right up and lie down."

Damn him, why can't he let me run this? "I'm all right." Outside, pushing up the hill to the maternity building, he said, "I thought you were in such a hurry to get here."

"It's okay, now I'm here," she panted. Now I'm here, now there's somebody to take care of me. The sun was getting high, the gray sky had turned blue. She looked abstractedly at the clouds floating overhead. Funny how they looked just like clouds on any other day.

They walked in. A wide hall with a gray marble floor. Doors, doors. Where?

A nurse in blue came around the corner, took the suitcase. "Mrs. Wolf?"

"Yes. I'm looking for. . ."

"This is the maternity ward."

She followed down the corridor, looking in at open doors. Women, sitting up in bed. Wonder when they had theirs? Must have been quite a while ago, to be sitting up. They only keep you a week though. Wonder when I'll be able to walk?"

A persistent chorus of piping came from the nursery, down one end of the hall. My God, one of 'em sounds like a ratty horn! *Mine* won't be like that!

That bump in front of me . . . what's inside? All curled up like a mouse. Sleeping, frowning, anonymous. Biting its toes or whatever they do. Will I know it when I see it? They look so aloof in the pictures, in those obstetrical books. Remote. Kind of scornful. Will it love me? Will it like me, even?

The nurse said, "Now would you like to be alone, or would you like a roommate?"

"I'd like a roommate." Who'll it be? Gamble. Still, anything but being alone.

"I'll take you down to one of my favorite people."

A sign on the door of the room said, *Joy Ward*. A woman was sitting up in a chair, at a low table, eating Christmas dinner. Turkey, dressing, sweet potatoes, vegetables. Institutional. Trying awful hard to look festive. They certainly feed you enough. All those starches. Won't help me get my figure back.

She looks nice. Sort of faded. A quilted housecoat, a blue nightgown . . . lacy . . . her best. That drab hair, sort of worn face. Looks pretty sick. About fifty? She doesn't look so old when she smiles.

"Hello. . ."

They exchanged names, greetings. The nurse put down her bag, pulled the green curtains around her bed. "Now, if you'll

get undressed. . .” How modest! Girl’s dormitory. Like college. How shocked they were then, when I went to the john naked. Little bitches. So pink and white. Never in anything less than a slip. Such nice girls . . . and the things they knew, Jesus Christ! What I wouldn’t have dreamed of. But it never showed. And me, who showed all my feelings. Running up four flights of stairs to tell them, the time Tommy kissed me. I was shaking so when he lifted me down from the wall. God, I must have had hot pants but I didn’t know it. And how they laughed. One woman laughing at another. It was kind of a new language, I’d never heard it before, but I learned it. Slow, but I learned it.

Wonder what time it is?

The other woman smiled, watching her climb into bed.

“Your first?”

“Uh-huh. Is it *your* first?”

“That’s right. I’m going home Saturday.”

“When’d you have it?”

“Last Tuesday. A little girl.”

“Oh, that’s nice. What’re you going to call her?”

“Jeanne Marie, I think. My husband likes that. You want a boy or a girl?”

What do I want? “Oh, we’ll love it whatever it is.” What he always says.

The nurse came back. “Now I’m going to take you down to the delivery room.”

“Already?” My God, delivery. So soon. I thought it would be hours.

“Just to prep you.”

“Oh.” The nurse brought up a wheel chair.

“I can walk.” Making me feel like a cripple already.

“This’ll be easier for you, with the stockings on.” The nurse slipped white pieces of linen on her legs and feet. The chair rolled smoothly over the waxed floor.

The delivery room. Not so much like a prison as I thought. One of those flat, padded, comfortable tables with a hump in the middle. Good. I like a flat surface to work on. And over in the corner . . . what’s that little thing? Oh! The baby’s bed. Sweet. I hope it’s soft enough for him. Looks kind of hard and cold and white. Sweet . . . the two of us alone in here, the bright light, alone, alone in the midst of all those people.

A razor passed over her stomach, thin, cool, prickly. Lord, I’ll be all bald down there. Funny, how naked that hump looks. We’ll laugh when I get home. Ouch . . . ouch, that pulls. Go

on, relax. Dilate. I can't. Don't be silly. Little pain like that? What'll you do when . . . I don't know. I don't know. She felt herself shrink, curl up, tighten all over.

"Having any pains?" the nurse asked.

"Well, just a little . . . not what'd you call pains."

"I'm going to give you a high enema. That usually brings the pains on."

"Good." Might as well get it over with. . .

Back on the ward, the bed felt good. Better make yourself at home, Tootsie, you'll be here quite awhile. Maybe I should sleep while I wait for something to happen. Sleep, hell! They're really starting up, now.

Look around. What's the female over there doing? Having company. That her mother, at the foot of the bed? Beautiful, that kind of perennial relaxed womanly look. Hope I'm that way when I get to be that age. Oooh . . . my back . . . my back . . . gosh it kind of swells on you . . . rolling over me. The bed-post. Hold tight. Hard, cool. Swing on it. That's right. I want to turn over, get out, away, away from it. There, it's going away. See, they go away in a minute. Not so bad. I don't even want to yell.

Oooh . . . again.

Swing on it. Turn over. Maybe it'll be better on that side. Funny, like when I was a kid. That dream I used to have, horrible faces, rows of them, like masks, glowing in the dark. I thought they were coming to get me. I used to be so afraid I'd die at night. I'd turn over to get away. On the other side I'd strain and strain to be sure they were gone . . . then I'd wake up.

That woman's looking at me. The mother. Smiling. She understands. Hope I'm not making faces. Can't stop.

My feet are so cold. Sweat all over. Funny I don't want to groan or anything.

She's talking to me . . . the other patient.

"How are you?"

"It's coming." Funny I've got to kind of squeeze my voice out. I'm tight all the way up, just like an icicle. I can't even push. How will I ever get it out? Dilate. . . I'd have to start dilating at the top of my ribs, it's frozen up to there. I'm so scared I can't even think. And yet I'm not acting bad, I'm not screaming. *I'm not screaming.*

See? There's even quite a while between pains. It's not so bad. You can relax.

Ooohh. . .

Go on. Meet it. Fight it. *Fight* it. Try. There. Squirm hard. You can't hit back, but you can duck.

Her company's going. "Want to go see it, Ma?"

What's she saying. . . "My mother's never seen the baby. They wouldn't let her, last time, they said you have to be accompanied by the father."

"Is it a boy or a girl?"

"A girl, eight pounds."

"Oh that's right, you told me before." God, she must think I'm a dope.

"I was in the labor room twenty-five hours. . ."

"My God." Twenty-five hours, that isn't unusual on a first though, suppose I. . .

"They had to take it with instruments, but my doctor, she's awfully good, there's only one mark, on the side of the head. She said it would go away."

"Oh, that's good." Instruments, she means a forceps delivery.

"The doctor asked me, she said, Are you minding your pains much? And I said, Oh, Doctor, it wouldn't be so bad if I only had something to hang onto."

"Well, didn't you?"

"Well, you know, they tie your hands. . ."

"Yeah, I've heard about that."

"And she turned around to the nurse, and she said, Some patients are so different to others. Some of these women yell and think we're killing 'em, and some of 'em, all they want is something to hang onto!"

Well, it seems to be all I want. Right now, anyway.

There's that delivery room nurse. Pulling the curtains again.

"How are you coming along?"

"Feels like about every five minutes."

The rubber gloved finger. Like that finger poking, the doctor who gave me my first diaphragm, examining, poking, pushing it up. God how scared I was. Lying there . . . how it hurt, the first time, that sharp, sharp pain. I thought, is this how it feels to have a baby? And the first night. Like running myself on a sword. He was so big. The tumbled bed . . . hot . . . the low ceiling, I stared and stared at it. Scared. Will my parents come? We were such kids. Just babies, groping around, hurting each other. I'm glad it didn't last, with him.

I didn't know from nothing, then. On the edge of everything. Scared . . . so many tender spots. Nobody'd tell me.

Ooh . . . she hurts.

"Your baby's nice and low." More poking. "Very low."

"Is that good?"

She won't answer.

"Guess it is. It won't have so far to go."

What's she smiling for?

"I guess we'll take you back."

Back?

"Back inside."

It's come. "Already? You don't have to." Let me stay here, push it away, push it away. Here in this nice soft, safe bed.

Wheeling me out. I can't smile this time.

The table feels good.

She tickles. Feeling my stomach . . . that big round lump. Handle it gently. Don't hurt it. Ooh. . .

"Are you having a pain now?"

"Oh yes, but it isn't way up there. Want me to show you?"

"I know, but I can feel it up here. You've still got it, too."

"Oh, sure." It hits you, God, takes the breath out of you.

"I think we'll put you to sleep now."

"You don't have to." See how long I can take it . . . how bad'll it get?

"I don't think we'll wait any longer." Smiling. Nice. Gentle. What's her name again? They told me before . . . Mrs. Something. Had one herself?

"Just take these pills."

Like to argue, but I can't. Guess I won't.

Hope they work soon.

Nothing. No change.

Give 'em time, dope.

Lie down. Relax. Give it a chance. There. Getting sleepy?

What's that? She's phoning the doctor. Talking about me. . .

"Your patient's making nice progress. She's opened up. . ."

Opened up?

Mmm. Sleepy.

Oooh. These pills *don't* work. And now I'm so sleepy I can't fight back. Damn them. Slowed it down too I think. Take longer.

My eyes won't stay open.

Voices. That's funny, I can hear but I can't talk.

"I'm going to give you a needle."

What do I care?

Tying my hands.

What's that little grunt, grunt, grunt? Must be me. At least I'm *not* groaning. I'm good.

"I can see the head and it's got black hair."

Has it? I heard that. That much, it's like me. *Wish* I could see if it's a boy or a girl. Just hold on a little. Can't be long now. If I could just stay awake. . .

"Get Dr. Galleani."

Sounds like she's in a hurry. . .

Can't grab anything. Tied. . .

What's that light? Hurts my eyes.

Feels good. Nice. Warm. Fuzzy.

What's that under me? Blanket.

No voices. Why don't I hurt anywhere?

Oh. I'm back here. I had it.

Gee, and I feel good.

"What time is it?"

"Around eleven."

Oh, that other woman. Good. Maybe she knows. . .

"Did you happen to hear them say what I had?"

I can talk. Gee! Not a bit drunk.

"You had a girl."

"Oh. A girl."

Little one, probably.

"How much did it weigh?"

"I don't know."

"Thanks." Can I move? On my belly. Oh. *Flat*. Feels so good to sleep on my belly again.

I'm thirsty. All dry.

Ought to be a pitcher of water. She put it here this afternoon. Some place in the dark. Oh, here. On the tray. It's heavy.

Can't. . .

Go on. Lift it.

There I *got* it. Even aimed for the glass. Trickle, trickle, there it goes.

Gee, I'm strong. I'm good. I lifted it and I aimed it and I poured.

I'll see the baby tomorrow. What time?

Can't wait.

A rumble woke her up the second time. Bright, yellow light snapped on. Rattle, clang, clang. She turned over.

"Bedpans."

A frowning nurse helped her on. Cold air blew in from the hall. The nurse cranked the bed up, and she leaned back. Gee, I feel so good. I did it, I did it. It's all over. Now I'm not a bit

afraid. It's funny. Before I didn't know what I was afraid of, now I'm not afraid.

It came out slowly, the terrible whisper she was afraid to hear.

It *didn't* crush me to pieces. I'm alive.

I'm whole. I'm here. I'm strong. I'm *me*. I can go right on. I even feel stronger than I was before. I couldn't, the first day after a baby. But I do.

I haven't even thought about God.

She whispered, "Thank you, God, for giving me a nice baby."

Prayer on a bedpan. Never mind, God won't care.

I feel so full, so happy. Just rest for a whole week.

"God, help me bring up the baby to be strong and good and happy."

Oh God, *will* I be a good parent? Will I be strong and balanced? Will I know what it wants? Can I *free* it? Her. I must let her go, I mustn't hang onto her, make her afraid. She must have a *good* childhood.

What will she be like? A stranger. Will I . . . the whisper . . . will I hate it?

When will I see it? When will I know?

She asked the nurse, "What time is it?"

"Did you do anything?"

"I can't."

"Well. . ." The nurse helped her off. "It's seven o'clock."

When. . . No use asking her. She doesn't want to tell me anything.

Wash water. Good, comb my hair, lipstick.

Now I feel human. Look good, too. I look fine.

Oh, here's that other nurse with the breakfast. The one who brought me in yesterday.

"Hi there! How are you?"

"Fine. How's my baby?"

My baby. I can say it here. He's not around.

"She's fine. You have a beautiful little girl."

"Yes, I know." They say beautiful to everybody. Doesn't mean anything. "When will I see her?"

"Oh . . . nine-thirty this morning, maybe."

Nine-thirty. Two hours. Might as well rest.

Gee, I'm hungry.

A good egg. Hardboiled. Good anyway. I didn't know hospital food could taste so good.

She smiled across at the other woman.

"Did I wake you up last night? Talking or anything?"

"No, you were fine, you just slept."

"I feel fine. Must have had an easy time."

"You did. I heard them say, a very easy time for the first."

"Wonder how much it weighed . . . oh, I forgot to ask that nurse."

She leaned back. "I think I'll sleep a little while."

She woke, briefly, when the nurse came in. "I forgot to ask you how much my baby weighed."

"Six pounds, twelve ounces."

So much? My God, how'd I do it? I thought five pounds. I was so small. Why that's a good respectable size! I feel nice and flat too. I went down fast, all right. Guess I'll have my figure back soon.

What *time* is it? Can't keep asking.

She's taking the tray. Can't be long now. Good, she left the door open. I can watch the hall. The nursery's that way.

Who's that coming? Rubber soled. Must be a nurse. She's got a blue bundle! Is it. . . No, She's going on.

When, *when*?

If I only knew what it looks like . . . there she comes again!

She's coming in here! Oh, the other woman's getting it. Funny little redfaced thing. Hefty. Well, she said eight pounds.

Look at her nurse it. Oh, I feel so empty. I want mine, I want it. God, she's enormous, those breasts are hanging down like sacks. Will I ever be that big? The blanket doesn't move. Can't even hear it suck. I'll die if I can't nurse her.

There she comes! She's saying it. . .

"Wolf?"

"Uh-huh."

I sound so calm, how'd I do it?

That little skinny thing? Looks like the rangy type. Won't have curves.

Here she is, beside you. Look at her face.

Oh, his child. All his. What the hell did I have to do with it, anyway?

She *hasn't* got black hair. Sort of tan.

Funny how familiar she looks.

She must be hungry.

The nurse was handing her a bottle of water. "You can try her with this."

Water? Guess it's all they get at first.

But she must want something more! Dope. The kid's hungry. She's had a long trip. She's tired.

There, pick her up, hold her, let her look at you.

That little periwinkle face! Look at her sparkle. She looks like a bright one. "Well, honey, you won't like this, but let's try it." There, I put it in her mouth. Easy. "Come. Suck. That's a good girl."

Oh the pet, she is taking it. She doesn't like it much though.

Here . . . up more. She isn't getting it that way. Ow, my legs. Hell with my legs.

My lambie. My love.

"How you making out?"

Oh, I forgot she was there. "Fine."

"She drinking it?"

"Well, she doesn't want it much, but she's doing all right." Funny, I *know* what she wants. I'm doing it. I'm doing it.

Not alone any more. I feel different. More me than ever.

Watch her, she's got gas.

"Want to burp?"

Sure, she wants to burp. I can swing her up, too.

There. Oh, she nestles in! Sweet, how she flops her head on my shoulder. Nuzzling into my neck. Maybe she likes me.

"Hi, pie-face."

You can talk to her.

"Don't want it? Okay, you don't have to."

She doesn't seem like a little baby. Like somebody else I know and understand.

Ooh, I'm tired. I can lean back after she's gone. Maybe it's good they don't leave them too long, at first.

Something happened. I don't know what. But I'm whole. She tore out of me and now I'm whole.

The nurse came in. "How's it going?"

"I think she's a little gassy."

"I'll burp her on he way back." She takes my word for it. She must know I *know*.

She held up the baby. The nurse tucked her into one arm, collected the bottle.

She sighed, stretched out. "Would you put my bed down?"

"Sure."

Have to get lots of rest, so I can be strong. She'll be in again, later.

A PARABLE OF PEREZ

William Goyen

PEREZ WENT about the little town in a dirty cap and a smile on his crooked mouth without a word to say, for he was deaf and dumb. A word in his mouth was as unknown as death.

He was a kind of handsome beast, living only by signs, and he could make a sound or a cry like a jackal or an owl for fear or wonder. Perez was dispossessed, belonging to no one, and he was the only one in the village who was whole. Because he could not speak or hear, he was considered worthless and of no value to be owned. He was sleek and shining as a curried beast. The lustre of his clean face and round head shone like a polish.

He was the word made flesh.

Everywhere he saw signs: the silver horns of ice on the fence-wires, the delicate roads and trails of small crawling things, the frail curved conchs of snails, a bird's lost yellow feather on the ground. Smoke, fruit, leaf, cloud, a wild unmothered hound, the tortured face of an ancient crinkled house, the hair curling over river stones—all were wordless as he, without ear or tongue, smitten with uncommunicable wonder, stricken with the stigma, the mark of the marvellous. But how could he tell of it? He came often to Manuela, a woman in the town, to tell of it, making a speech with his eyes. In the spring he would come from the fields to tell her of the new time, that the betrayal was past, the crucifixion done, and now the rebirth. He would come from the river, his hands dangling dripping, to show that the river was free, that its cask was shattered, as though he had made some ablution there. Or he would bring the limb of a tree to her porch to show the little pox of buds upon it; or the first daffodil, born hard. He spoke to her with bright bits of cloth, or shards of mica or quartz from the mountain, with fruit he came to Manuela's porch with little ephemeral wild flowers, leaving them as tokens. But Manuela did not hear what they said.

Perez had no communion with talking people, who presume their throat is some rare treasury of precious stones (open the purse string of their lips and out fall coins of gold, gems and jewels). For what could people really *say* to one another that could not be uttered by the face, its eyes and lines and mouth, or transmitted by the cringe or spread of lips, the eloquent declamation of the brow?

For Perez, the oratory of the body was the supreme elocution: a leap, a dance, a strut, crouch by cradle; a woman's broom-stoop, hops, strides, flights; a cowering by a mud wall. He related man to beast: equine, feline, canine, bird, cat, rat-man.

And what was there to *hear* that could outblast the eternal crying and singing of silence? Could joy, could wonder be worded? Who could enunciate these like an owl, a coyote, a river?

His vocabulary was as empty as a beggar's pocket, as chaste as a blank page unmutilated with words. He knew no agonizing contest with concepts tormenting to be worded or the senses' impressions haggling to be expressed. He felt; and he had not strayed beyond feeling, for there was no road there. Enigma remained enigma and was not thrown down to be whored upon by the unslakable prurience of explanation. His images kept themselves virgin and unviolated by the wanton rape of rhetoric, for in Perez the word remained image, as pure and as fresh as when it came upon him, like a scare; and therefore he had no quarrel with statement. Exegesis and dialectic, conceit and casuistry, sophistry, equivocation, the quarrel and clashing of Systems, the crucifixion of Proof that demanded the nailed death of Conclusion—these were spared him.

Nor had he suffered amputation by men's opinions and judgments, not hearing them; but he went whole and unjudging, leaving the world as it was and using it like an unmodified garment, responsive as echo from a well cried down and as unsuspecting of the treacherous Duality as a child being fed from the gland that excites and serves alien appetites.

Unlanguage, unexpressed, Perez went about in a world of wonder in a great metaphorical glee, in a euphony of silence. He was a clean unfilled vessel of dumbness. His actions in the town were little parables of the marvellous; everywhere he, too, left tokens of the inscrutable mystery of which he was a sign and a warning.

He did not know whence he came, it must have been out of a beast world of no tongues, nor who spawned or bore him. Some wild and wondrous thing had called and claimed him, and he

belonged to no other. He had the inviolate freedom of beasts which makes them, finally, unclaimable, and somewhere in a day that may have been only yesterday, the wide wild silent world took him to it, to keep him like a beast.

Although occasionally some idler would catch him like a stray hound in the town and, with gaming faces called round, try to pervert the purity of his wordless world by drawing foul names in the dirt, he was never taught the treason of any word. A touch could tell him something, could make understanding ripple through him as though someone had delivered a speech to him and he had heard, and answered like Demosthenes.

Manuela waited as desperately as anyone in the waiting town, as women wait. Waiting, she sat on her little porch, her hands one upon the other in her lap, entranced in yearning, her senses swimming the dead waters of suspended desperation. It was something marvellous she wanted, waited for. It might come at any moment and when it appeared she must be caught waiting for it like a patient ambushed hunter. It was as if she were saying "When, oh when? I have waited so long." She may have reasoned with herself thus: "A thing will come to you if you know how to wait right for it. Most everyone waits badly; only a few know how to wait and in the right way. Just wait, Manuela, firmly and slowly wait, and you will see."

Whatever it was that came to her while she sat waiting, passed by her like false alarm or a tricked-up surprise, was not bright enough.

But Perez sat on Manuela's porch in the twilight sleep of his silence, trying to tell her a thing. Sitting on her steps in the dusk, dark and heavy, he would do everything he knew to make her come close to what he knew, with his eyes, calling to her, burning; with his face, all the lines and curves and masks of conversation. But Manuela would sit on her porch, a little removed from and raised above Perez, her hands one upon the other in her lap, entranced in yearning, motionless, her senses swimming the dead waters of suspended desperation. To have a deaf mute on her steps, to whom she could neither tell it nor hear consolation from, was a further gift of sorrow. She kept saying to herself, "One day It will turn to me, what I wait for, falling all gentle as a child, all tender, turned to me ever so slowly, as a flower turns to the sun, and there will be an unfolding in me, an opening out, big and slow it will turn to me and come to take me to it, big and slow and sure." (What was it she

waited for, sitting on her porch, folded hands in her lap, with Perez on the step below her in a twilight sleep in the twilight?)

But when, one day, a big man named Mike Cormada, who had dark blood and a wasp-red beard and whose bones in his brown cheeks were thick and arched high and curved round the deep cavities where two great black eyes were set in deep, like mountings of onyx, came walking to her out of a brawling world of cries and oaths and promises and protestations, she fell to him like a mouth to a mouth. And when he spoke from a wide word-infested mouth, she whispered "Quiet, quiet, Cormada; be still, be still. There is nothing to say."

This happened in a little town full of unquickened, waiting people, loafers and loungers, waiting to be shocked or surprised or to take sides against something. Where it seemed all things were uncomely and broken, and belief in anything and hope for anything were worn out and old, and the houses were crumbling at the corners and, because there was no rain, the crops languished and came up scrubby and the apples were dwarfed and shrivelled for want of quickness in the earth. This happened in a chattering town I know where the streets lay broken and unmended and the people seemed to be waiting for anything bright and marvellous to go upon them, like a parade or a procession, or something fierce like a wild lion, something evil, even, like Satan going to and fro upon them. The doors of the houses waited and yearned for something magical to knock upon them and the windows for a rap upon their panes and a face, like a grieved ghost's, to look in and whisper "I have come," and restore wonder.

LIFE DREAM

Audrie Girdner

THE HUSBAND was adorning himself in his best suit, and there was something about a tie, difficulty in putting it on, knotting it, something like that. Her feeling was one of anaesthesia—of knowing where and precisely how each thing in the world was in that single sliced off piece of time, but not being able to reach it or even to touch a particle of it or of herself, so immobile, everything, in that sliced moment. Her eyes closed firmly, she knew what he was doing.

Outside, the night was hot and moist and also immovable, waiting for him. And for what other manner and kind of beasts and persons who would go out into it to live their fierce and warm small moments? Martin's head turned unconsciously in a slight motion of self approval.

Martin. Tying his tie, knotting it the way he liked it, twisting it rightly and with the head-cock of approval as from days and years of habit, each day and night of the dressing business. . . So much a habit that this minute (or past minutes of it) made the kind of dream flash to come to her again and again.

It was as if she were standing next to him, watching. Yes, that must be how she was able to see. She, the other moving self, was at his elbow, looking on. This walking self projected by the dreaming mind as on a screen. And meanwhile ears were hearing faint cry of children from the nursery, and awareness visioning the moving self stop, poised to rigid attentiveness. Then quickly there seemed hands to muffle out the cries, to soothe away into nothingness—smoothing hands, her hands, long, tapering, efficient white fingers tucking under covers, wiping the faces, feeling foreheads, feet for warmth, and panties for wetness. A close-up of the hands. The mother arms of her soul self.

Sometimes her dream was in these pictures, and other times there were many words, sentences, the rush of words upon words. Tumbling, meaningless, left over from the day's doings, haunting the room, unimportant in their meaninglessness, but not yet old enough to be erased. Voices about falling and hurting, of buying, of household, of everything that clutters up the lighted hours, fills them to give an appearance of being full.

Mommy, pin me. . . may I go over to . that other lady, Norma . . . papa went over. . . I saw . your husband, misses. . . it fell, I didn't push him. . . here, please, buy me, please . good children do this . .

I wish, dress, I wish . . . nothing I wish anymore . can be .

Oh, going out tonight? Last night you . bed early . tired, rest from work. . . what's the use . yes, I'll fix it . groceries in the bin, cans running low . . I wish, I wish, what do I wish . .

Why do I let him?

And, turning these off to tune in the more indelible words of the past, with the same inflections as they really were once, ghost words, so real . Mother, duty . it pays to . mustn't, mustn't, must never let . my example . don't ever believe what they say, your father a good man . maybe . I don't know. . . yes, good . do right . what people say, what will they think . . never mind, watch yourself. . careful, careful. . .

Mother eyes alternating condemnation with piety, child of your weak father, they accused. Tread the different path, pity and pray. Mealy pure. Sweet words with hate eyes.

Why this mother hold?

Then words melted into easier vision. Relax at last from confusion, into the wonderful present dream-fancy, that acute awareness of the sleep numbed state allowing her to look into any woman's house. Even into Norma's house, where Martin would soon enter. So easy to trace down an affair with this new gadget, the post-war invention. Especially for the dreamer's wish had science fashioned it, plastic x-ray fitted to the left eye. No effort, no movement, no worry. Simply lift it eyeward and it glows and glows, the forgotten wife squatting behind some shrubs outside, the growing glowing and yet unseen gadget to her eye. Oh, look, see Norma moving about brightly in her red dress with powder on her face and perfume behind her ears, getting ready for Martin.

All wise, the great new instrument of intuition, the dream thing!

At last she, the wife woman, throwing her gadget down and running away, covering her head with night darkness, laughing in her spying discovery. With everything known, it was beginning to be so funny, so distorted, funny! There was even laughter besides her own, other voices giving sound effects of laughter. Lithely running away amidst the laughter and voices and hooves and motors and dogs barking, following farther and farther behind her, outdistanced, she cleverly escaping detection.

Why had she let him keep her in blindness so long, when it was so easy to see? The dream gadget.

Lying there, the actual slumbering body looked surprisingly stiff. Though so knowing, while impotently asleep. Knowing of Martin, knowing of Norma, knowing chi'd memories, knowing of her own children off-scene, and becoming increasingly knowing of the warm dark night outside. Frequently, now, in slumber, she was learning to recognize its call. She had kept the knowledge a secret; hence it was not afraid to come to her, to keep calling her every night, night after night, calling.

And she began to be listening, not with dread, but with smiling... Why should she let him keep her from it? When he was as he was.

Quickening—an ever so faint turn of the body, a stirring. Awakening, but not wanting to awaken. Time slowly beginning to spin into action once more. Brought about by far-off whimpering of children drawing nearer, sufficient only to irritate to faint aliveness. Once more, quickly, set will against reality. Wanting more sweet rest, wanting sweet imaginings. Preserve the peaceful state, conjure up a new picture of independent hands to soothe. Life began and ended in whimpering indigestion. Their wanting to eat and grow tall and to edge her out of the play. Ignore.

Unfairly, she managed to fool her enemies, her children, in a new surge of slumber. The body turned, facing the open window, and part of the warmth came in and touched the form, made it strain towards pulsating stars.

What kind of self fancying man was he to keep her down so long? Martin, the unfaithful, frequently unfaithful. Disdain passed over the sleeper's face, body contracted in anger, wishing. Martin. Why did she let him? Husband, husband, come home to me now; the candle's in the window. LO, poor sucker!

But now look! It was not really Martin tying that necktie, for he had suddenly turned into her father, with the frightened old and thin death look on his de-plumped, puckered-in face.

There was a whimper in the night, but this one came from a back generation. It was her own child-whimper. The scene was her father figuring up many figures. The figuring up of figures which was, somehow, supposed to balance the world.

Vivid memory came hurtling—memory of his stretching out there on that real afternoon, trying not to heed the loudest phone ringing of all their lives. Resting on the bed, hands covering bloodshot eyes, instructing family to lie to the entity, the Bank. Something gone wrong with figures which feverishly balanced their world. The entity seeming magically to call through the unanswered phone company wire, scolding of accounting there, questioning work. Whatever could have impelled him to play with the god-thing, his employer, the Bank? What, what, they kept asking him, but he lay there covering his eyes. Whatever made him distort his precious numbers? At last Sunday came, moratorium Sunday. And once more things had balanced. Father and then mother and then all three children and also that other woman dressed in her warm fur coat, lean figure under it, all tiptoeing across the tight rope, over brink depression.

See, it's easy! We can all balance, if we're very clever! But mother looks around and would like to push the woman off. . .

Even that memory imprinted day the father had worn the death look—preview of things to come. Anxiety. This one fleeting experience to remain to haunt her, rather than remembering years of his florid, fat smiles, normality years existing between death grip crises. He'd tried to disguise the look even then, that fleeting preview, as he reclined, still healthy, in shirt sleeves, forced smiling countenance flushed from effort of nonchalance.

That day before Sunday, she, the girl, wanting terribly to escape the scene, had been waiting for a phone call from Martin, high school Martin, but they were forbidden to answer. Actuality, that. Life in focus in bright light of summer; yet all she had been able to think of then was wanting to run quickly away over tight rope depression, to eliminate time's slowness, to fly into make believe, to fly over mother and the woman in the fur coat, over father figuring and figuring, to pass completely into numerous nights with Martin. Lips parting often in youthful laughter, voices crooning secrets, hands swinging and forever holding over miles of footsteps, dance steps, swelling pathways of companioned life.

That was the hope. Real days of it had been few. Actually remembering only one, the first, the most real. It was a picture done in technicolor, with sharp, definitive pantomime. Not the

day of her wedding, but later—a summer evening with all the trimmings of moon and trees and warm breeze, the hope and home, the stage. Green leaves showing in the starlight ungreied by average nightfall lighting. Imagined to be the beginning, it was really a sort of ending, because, soon after, the unpleasantness had started, creeping onstage, and even the scenery changed its look. Disreputable decay of built wood and living chlorophyll and twig showing brightly in full day's light for what it was, and the other life beginning to show on Martin, protagonist.

He had revealed the prize and then begun to rob her of it in little bits. The many nights grew fewer and fewer and finally passed entirely out of her house.

The wash of remembrance receded. Surely there was fault to pin. Someone responsible. She struggled in confusion. Not the woman in the fur coat. Come farther along in time. But no, not Norma, alone. Someone else—or many. This woman and that one, and several on carousals. The shock of them repeating itself until they were no longer shock but monotonous nothing. She, the mature woman, never free to fly lightly away. Duty here. Children, home, husband. And also habit. And wormed-in envy.

You could count them on your fingers—the days and nights before each of his women's disposal. That had been consolation. They had passed to the scrap heap, too.

Long habituation now beginning to soften the caricatures, to make the nights seem warm and friendly, beckoning once more, giving length and depth and stretching and yearning, laziness and eternity. Releasing discovery in the make. Her life had been sleep, and now asleep she would wake.

The figure at Martin's side relaxed and started to smile. Worry erased. She had mulled it over for years, trying to figure, to make it all balance. Not with numbers, but with blocks of life, unsolved puzzles, numerous unbuilt buildings. Adult puzzles beyond her contending. Life a string of unfinished projects. And now, after all the years, it was to be so easy! A simple dream had been sent to her in revelation.

For the dreamer, at least, it was solved. How absolute the dream answered! How illuminating!

The body grew restive for the play to proceed.

The general question had been this: either it must be freedom, with all loving on the earth and reproducing and singing and working, with nothing ever unfinished because of the continuity, raw nature never ending, many women and many men, all lovable and all beautiful and all loving and smiling as if it was

the same face with the same soul inside; that way, or life should be in compartments. Closed units. The homes of the women's magazines. The homes that go to church. The homes that belong to children. Husbands bringing sustenance to the one wife and her young—all enclosed in a house, secure, solid-walled, no phones ringing through, no women permeating their mortar, no men eyeing the windows. Both faithful, and father and mother acting out the play for the sake of the small who were watchfully hearing.

General problem unsolved. But for herself, decision. Still time to spring the trap and to walk out free. No longer stay home. hurt, like her mother before her. Wounded crying mother growing bitter and unpleasant. Strained, pursed lips and round, far-away blue eyes, vague hands. Until no one would ever think of looking.

Not so the dreamer. Many had looked her way, though up to now her eyes had denied them all. Even once when there had been that one who cried oh, please. I'd be so good to you, but the hurt mother within her had answered I know you would but I can't, my husband, my children . .

Never. But how she had wanted.

Now, yes.

No longer nature to bob up in various disguises, bothering slumbers of the eager body. Breaking through surfaces. Useless beauty wasting. She would go out into the evenings where everything was right. After Martin finished his tie and sneaked out, she, too, would leave, to know the forbidden joys of agony. His departure near at hand. She waiting for his habitual, "Hello, sport," tipping the hat-brim in approval of his mirrored reflection.

The miraculously unseen play figure at his elbow smiled. A lively high colored smile with laughter in it. Magical mother hands would stay at home, tending. The true she to step out beautifully into the night to search for him. Someone murmuring, loving, aware of her as Martin no longer was. So easy.

Lord, Lord, at last, at last he had ceased dandying and was sneaking out the front door. She adorned herself hastily, tossed back her shining hair. Perfumed and manicured, she passed approving hands down over her narrow thighs. The lovely figure seemed almost to float out, as if drawn by some force into the warm night.

Oh, but wait, first—be sure you are perfect. One look into the mirror, then out into freedom . She caught her face in the mirror suddenly and it was an older face. Changing there into

oldness. Her breath came strangled. The hair altered in color, shimmering upswept and forty grey, then rapidly growing frizzled and old before her very eyes. The body broadening and sagging. The whole self shriveling. She was her mother, her grandmother, finally into undifferentiated matter. Already. So soon.

MANIFESTO OF THE TWO LIONS

Peter Viereck

(Note de l' éditeur: Regard, my old, these two animals formidable, with their sad eyes of philosopher, guarding actually—I ignore since how many years—the “New York Public Library” at the 42nd street.)

* * *

WHAT? REVOLUTION? Revolution? Sir, revolution is atrocious. Sir, there shall be no revolution.

Not expansive lushness but norm. Not expensive plushness but form. Not innovating wilfulness but Melville's awe for the archetype. Bounds and boundaries again; oceans as lakes, cut down to proportion and no nonsense. To the rescue of King Canute.

Je hais le mouvement qui déplace les lignes, und das Gesetz nur kann uns Freiheit geben.

(As in “there is no god but”), there is no civilization but the Middle Sea, and France is its prophet. Romanized Gaul. Everything else is gnashing of teeth in the outer darkness, a barbaric yawp over the roofs of the Roman *limes*. (As in Jefferson), every man has two countries, his own and France.

Necessary to coin at once the verb “to mediterraneanize”: lucidity, serenity, proportion, and grace. I mediterraneanize; thou mediterraneanizest; he, she or it mediterraneanizes. (As in Santayana's ode), of thee the Northman by his bleached galley dreamt, O sacred Mediterranean. Unseen he loved thee; for the heart within him knew earth had gardens where he might be blessed, putting away long dreams and aimless barbarous hunger for battle.

No freedom in formlessness and free verse and anti-reason and impulse-from-the-vernal-wood and the political doctrine of

Permanent Revolution. Thou shalt believe in Milton, Dryden, Pope. Thou shalt not set up Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey. Because the first is crazed beyond all hope. And because in 9 A. D. his vernal wood was named Teutoburg; and it was still a Teuton-burg in that second revolt when the whole century, the whole cemetery, the 19th (abhorred of the moon), the romantic, the—yes, against that same Empire: against pattern, balance, limit: against *limes*. Rousseau, Rousseau, give me back my legions.

(As in “down with the three unities, long live self-expression”), Romantik, romantisme, romanticismo, give me back my Long Walls—once they called me “school of Hellas”—give me back my violet crown. And in the end (as in “I didn’t know it was loaded”) nothing remains after the battle of Hernani, nothing, nothing, merely *le coucher du soleil romantique*: I did but touch the honey of romance, and must I lose a soul’s inheritance? Des crapauds imprévus et de froids limaçons, is it for this that I have given away mine ancient wisdom? Good Saint Pericles, ora pro nobis.

If the Hudson River at Greenwich Village is Shakespere’s seacoast-of-Bohemia, sculptured out of plastered-in-Paris, then how forgive, by what discipline and sacrifice atone for the rive-gaucheries of our 1920s? Look shining at—strict styles of architecture, a chain of heart. Back to Doc Aristotle and Canossa; for to Hart Crane the Doctor had said—who was American also—“You cannot heed the negative, so might go on to undeserved doom . . . must therefore loose yourself within a PATTERN’S MASTERY that you can yield to—by which also you win and gain mastery and happiness which is your own from birth.”

Or else, is art the infinite capacity for faking pains?

Necessary to rebuke immediately the insubordination of overweening Economics and loutish Appetite and leftist-naive Naturalgoodnessofthemasses and rightist-wrongist *élite-delete-fascism*. Not Anglo-Saxon bathtubs, not nordic clean-shaves, not more and more and more of progressive education, but more Latin and more Greek. Sergeant Economics (says Pfc. Classics), you think you’re pretty smart, but we’re watching you; don’t think we don’t know you were only a bootblack in civilian life; and now, just because you’re the Colonel’s orderly, you—but sincerely, let’s make up and be friends; let’s all meet in that nice dark little alleyway next to the precipice, and we’ll give you a

real surprise-present to celebrate that fine promotion you won for building such a cheery fire with our books.

No Untergang, no Decline and Fall; THE REGENERATION OF THE WEST THROUGH THE DIGNITY AND PURITY OF FORM; man as person instead of man as insect.

The esthetic sense once more in control of the utilitarian sense, today inhibiting it, tomorrow fulfilling it; not only cloudward to ivory towers but earthward to ivory factories. Except for the lowest indispensable minimum, no more cowering and groveling before the muscular adjective "Practical"; ringside tipsters whisper he is a mere debating-point champion and shows poor footwork in wrestling with angels; through jiu-jitsu, he can be forced to concede that only death is "Practical" in the "long run," is "realistic," is "here to stay" and that nothing else "really works" anyway.

"Many are the thyrsis-bearers, but few are the true Bacchantes." Grillparzer and Mallarmé?—each in his fashion, yes! Bernanos and Benda and secretary-of-Europe Gentz and old-magician Mann?—yes, as secretares of the Noble Voice. Prophetic craftsman Baudelaire?—yes, as L'Albatros round the neck of all introverted Modern Mariners. Byzantium's Yeats?—alas, yes! (as in Gide's "Victor Hugo, hélas"). Matthew Arnold?—not quite (E for Effort) but at least better than Carlyle. Anatole France?—hmmm.

Attention all honorable men. Candidates wanted for integrity test. Volunteers will assemble secretly at dawn in Axel's castle, after burning all dependents and private papers. Cards on the table straight and to the point; we know who we are, and we know who they are, and we know why we are here today. Candidates must have no fear of pterodactyls or barking advertisements. Integrity prize for the highest combined score under the following three categories (Erasmus and Spinoza as final judges in case of tie):

1. any intellectual who refrains from anti-intellectualism; ("need of the jellyfish for the rock"; inevitable progression from garden-variety Bovarysme to trahison des clerics);

2. any philistine who refrains from easy satirizing of philistinism; (the Century of the Middle Brow; Uncle Sam the sophisticated hick; Rotarians chuckling dutifully over Sinclair Lewis);

3. any 20th-century American who agrees with Alfred North Whitehead that "philosophy at its greatest is poetry and necessitates esthetic apprehension. Almost all we have of any real and lasting value has come to us from Greece. We should be better

had we kept a bit more." (Confidential aside to electrician: set up lie-detector chair to determine sincerity of those who agree with Whitehead statement; "accidental" electrocution of any who agree out of mere snobbism.)

Back to pure reason; pragmatism publicly unmasked as unpragmatic; to be arranged, a lecture series by Thomas Aquinas to make clear to *The New Republic* the genuine urgency of debating how many angels can stand on the point of a pin. *Princeps ipse est incarnata lex, cui servire est regnare.*

Thucydides more up-to-date than this morning's newspaper (426 B. C., the fifth year of The War: "Men too often, in their revenge, set the example of doing away with those general laws to which all alike can look for salvation in adversity"). But supplemented by Burke and Burckhardt, of course.

America a giant baby, shaking the European death-rattle. But coming of age, must accept. Accept what? The mission. What mission? The new and the same: to potter about into a *neo-neoclassicism*.

Clarity and reasonableness more exciting than visceral enthusiasm or sublime vagueness. Consequently, special homage to Samuel Johnson (note to Modern Language Association: revise textbooks accordingly). No more southern Californias!

Official directive to the conservative conservation-corps and to all playboys of the western world: wasteful drains on civilization to be stopped at their source; necessary to conserve our fourfold GRAECO-ROMAN-CHRISTIAN-HEBREW HERITAGE; please post.

Four, all four; caution against dropping Graeco from Roman-Christian-Hebrew; lop-sided heritage worse than none; as alternative to practicality-cant, not incense-cant but reason and taste. *Précieux* and sinister at same time: idolized, idyllized, and idealized scenario of medieval serfs folk-dancing in folk-costumes around Gothic cathedral and strewing anti-trade-union tracts printed on hand-illuminated parchments. For all is lacking if civilian courage is lacking and the moisture of the rights of man is lacking. Though I speak with the tongues of men and angels, and have not Clarity, I am become as sounding brassiness or a tinkling Symbol.

No freedom but through rigor, reverence, tradition, decorum, and high conservatism, which has more in common with the penetrating acuteness of good Marxmanship than with muddle-

class-fascist pseudo-conservatism but will supersede both tomorrow morning. Love as the last-minute rescuer but manicured by Irving Babbitt; salvation via dandyism, poise, silence, and Euclid.

When the right virtuous Sir Philip Sidney and I were at the Emperor's court together: Roncevaux, Roncevaux, Roncevaux, morne plaine. Or in clear 12th-century Norman, the question, the obvious question: Plus valt Mahum que Seint Perre de Rume? And certainly (as in "here I stand, I can do no other") the Sidney-worthy answer: en Rencevals je irai juindre Rollant!

And always and again (Franceis sunt mult gentilz) the Mediterranean. Graeco-Roman-Christian-Hebrew. The return of every northern—yes, and eastern—Völkwanderung to the fold (this mutually wrangling fourfold) of the universal civitas. Then western man, sun itself, faces the west again: "returnent Franc en France dulce terre."

* * *

Thus spake THE LAST HUMANISTS; but the wind of autumn was louder
for a little while.

PROGRESS: A DUET

Peter Viereck

What do you see in the holy dread of the moonlight?
(Is it fire-lures dawdling on treacherous bogs?
Or a goat-leap you cannot quite glimpse through the fogs?
Or some slut of a goddess with red-eared dogs
Hunting her lover, the moon?)

*Clambakes, clambakes on cranberry bogs;
Cans piled up to the moon.*

What do you see in the holy dread of the moonlight?
(Some stalker whose reverent pouncing Yes
Affirms new unicorns of delicate loveliness?
When he kills, is it true that his beautiful claws caress
A painting, a poem, a moon?)

*Clambakes, clambakes on cranberry bogs;
Hamburgers dimming the moon.*

What do you feel in the holy dread of the moonlight?
(Are you drunk—till the hush of it chills your hair—
With the great soul of Man and his gay-tragic prayer
To cry and die for that moon up there?
O pronounce me the wine of the moon!)

*It's clambakes, clambakes on cranberry bogs;
Gumdrops all over the moon.*

STONE STILL, STONE COLD

John Goodwin

ONE WIFE LEFT HIM because he bit his nails down to the flesh and when, with an unremitting rain of abuse, she had provoked them into growth they sprouted coarse and ridged. He, in retaliation, allowed the dirt to accumulate beneath them and when his wife still complained he replied with some justification that she would have to make up her mind whether she preferred his nails short and chewed or long and dirty; there was no alternative. At least so he in his pride and logic thought. While he was in his study one evening she packed what few possessions she could reasonably call her own and left the house before supper, running away from him for once and for all.

When his concentration waned and his appetite waxed he came out of his den roaring for food, demanding an explanation for the delay, grumbling over his wife's laxity. He found her note where she had left it, propped up against a can of corned-beef hash and a can of spinach that she had set, in a flush of pity and maliciousness out on the stove for him. The note announced simply that she was leaving. Cursing, he heated the cans and ate for he knew his wife to be a woman of her word and that he could expect no remorseful capitulation from her that night or any future night; were he to put off eating until her return he would starve.

That wife, Elsa, had left him while he was still young or young enough so that he could still look at his body in the mirror without regret. Another wife left him later in his life but she had been a fawning, irresolute woman; one whom he had literally to chase out of the house. She tried to come back several times but he threatened her so wildly and cumulatively that she had at length to give up and never pestered him again. That was, he often thought, where she really proved herself stupid; believ-

ing that he would have, could have carried out any of his threats. After all those dreary years she should have known that he never did anything he said he was going to do. She should have known his promises were no more than pathetic little self-assertions; God knows, he knew it himself.

With his wife's final display of dull-wittedness, even though in a way it flattered him, he lost whatever traces of honor and respect he had had in reserve for her. He leaned out the window and chuckled to himself as he watched her the day she surrendered; her suitcase in her hand, waiting for a streetcar at the corner. She was so angry and frightened and in the cardboard suitcase were jumbled all the paraphernalia of her decade of intimacies with him. He wanted to shout some schoolboy taunt at her but he was afraid she would look up, see that it was he, and cry. Whenever she cried her whole face slipped like a fleshy avalanche, and that was something he couldn't bear.

His third wife died. It wasn't really his fault although he realized that philosophically it was. But unless you drew a line somewhere between what happened *because* of you and what happened merely because of you co-existing, life became impossible. He was likely, in discussions with friends, to claim that the individual was in some way responsible for the fate of every animate or even inanimate object with which he or she came in contact. His acquaintances accused him of being a mystic, those more familiar with him considered him to be vain.

There had, of course, been other women. His trap of physical ugliness, rather than his bait of intellectual mastery, caught them. There had even been a fumbling homosexual affair but neither he nor the boy had known exactly what to do. After a futile sally of embraces they had continued to sit by the river's edge like two embarrassed Adams in the Garden. At last he dismissed the boy with "Well, it's time I got back to my more practical duties" and never saw him again. Whenever he told about it, and he often did, content whether the reactions were ones of hostility or amusement, he would sum the experience up by saying, "An experiment in isomorphism, you know." He even claimed to have forgotten the name of the boy involved, would describe him in such malicious and revealing terms that at last someone in the group would say, "Oh you mean so-and-so" and he would reply, "Why, yes, of course, that's who it was."

At the moment he was alone. He was forty-nine or maybe only forty-eight and was spending the summer in the country writing a long article on *Narcissism and the Martyr Image*. He

hoped that maybe without too much effort it would expand itself into a book tying up anarchy and the death-wish of the professional saint. He might even find a place for his theories on Grunewald. In his spare time he visited people and they visited him. The summer days were sweet and beginning to be full of the spice of cherries in the boughs and the cat-like familiarity of unmowed grass upon the ears and shoulders as one lay talking in the afternoon sun.

He was a man of position, of reputation and of blandishments. What he wrote was sometimes quoted and what he said was often repeated. He was inclined to compose ornate introductions for the catalogues of artists as yet without a public and during the winter one would often see his stoop-shouldered back posturing like a chicken's as he pecked at the corn of art, philosophy and politics at cocktail parties or during the intermissions of small recitals. He was too florid in his style, a dilettante in enthusiasms but he was a champion of whatever seemed valid and integral and timely. His sincerity was perhaps a pose for, like an affection in a less artful man, it came as a shock when one first met him. But he had come a long way from the stuttering, pimpled boy who had discovered both Hegel and Paracelsus on a rainy March day in the public library of Davenport, Iowa. Since then he had acquired a sort of courage as other men with ambitions might acquire wealth or tolerance or even wisdom. He was almost happy even, except for a recurring dream.

He would tell about the dream and joke about it and deliberately tear it to shreds like a caged beast with its ration of raw meat, and he would encourage others to do the same. In fact if, during this summer when the dream had first made its appearance, he happened to preface a remark with "Last night..." or "The strangest thing..." his friends would interrupt and say, "Please, Harrod, not your dream again!"

The dream as he told it was this: I am sleeping. When it begins I am aware of sleeping. It is a sleep of exhaustion that turns gradually into incunabular inanimation. I seem to be somewhere where there is foliage or something that intrudes upon my awareness as foliage, and between this foliage there stretches in both directions from me a conception of infinity and yet I know dimly that were I able to get up and become myself I would be able to at least know, if not actually see, what lies ahead or behind. I am aware of existing and of something like memory but really more, I suppose, like prescience. It is a kind of primeval ache. I sense that I am unique and yet I feel no individuality.

All around me there seem to be countless imitations of me; or rather not so much imitations as that I am repeated. I lie for a long time in this benumbed state. And then I hear what in my waking hours I know must be horses, but in my dream I don't hear clippity-clop but am merely jolted by the vibrations of the approaching hooves. Quite a lot of them I think. They are coming very rapidly, at a gallop; and I am afraid or apprehensive rather, for fear is too animate a sensation for me. The horses are on me and one of them must kick me for I feel the sharp fire of contact with its shoe. It shatters my stupor rather than causing me any pain, and I wake.

All the old saws were brought out as interpretations to the dream. One woman said it was persecution mania and another infantilism: "Back to the womb and all that with your mother probably kicked by a horse." And although he had tried, as he always did nowadays, to keep the conversation on his dream it had veered off into some insecure romanticism about the horse being the mother-image and the sea-horse doubly so.

By midsummer he seldom mentioned his dream. Other people's dreams are as boring as other people's operations someone had told him and he realized it was quite true and he did his best, solely for the sake of his reputation as a conversationalist, to avoid mention of the dream. But it consumed him inwardly and he even once irreverently considered consulting a priest or fortune-teller. He refused to expose his dream to the familiar formula of psychiatry for he felt it had grown to be something outside the laws of insanity even. It was something almost mystic, like a glimpse of God through the wrong end of a telescope. He didn't want to have it explained away now that it had attained such threatening proportions; he wanted it revealed.

By late summer the dream had become so much a part of his life that he almost accepted it but the role he played in it was one of such inertia that it troubled him more than the enigma of the dream itself. It was very disquieting for a man of intellectual action to dream every night that he lay moribund, feeling nothing akin to any human emotion. As the dream repeated itself night after night he realized, while awake, that more and more frequently he anticipated the horses' approach with relief for the contact of their hooves not only broke the monotony of insensibility within the dream, but also propelled him back into the familiar world of waking wherein he once more was capable of reason and action. What once had been the moment of dread, if such an atrophied sensation could be so defined, had now lost its

original effect and became to him, in his sleep, the moment of interruption that he longed for. But, as this feeling grew more positive, the time during which he lay so numbly awaiting the horses to approach became more and more protracted. As he recalled the first weeks of the dream, it had been but a matter of hours before the horses came but now the time seemed endless within which he endured a terrible kind of boredom. The sensation, or lack of it, was so disagreeable and he so powerless to act that he longed for the original concept of the dream to return. He would have preferred to remain in ignorance of the salvation that, because of its very promise, seemed so long in coming.

Unwilling to go to bed he would sit up late into the nights inundating himself with whatever literature might reassure him of his ability to think. And he would start a book only to throw it from him across the room for in this gesture he proved to himself that he still had choice, for in the dream he was incapable of recollection or surmise, much less action. Or weary of reading he would visit friends in the vicinity and attempt to keep them up long after their normal bed hour with argument and dissertation in which he grew more and more querulous and trivial as if to convince himself of his freedom. But it was as much a trial for him as for his friends for, though he brutally ignored their yawns, he was constantly under the strain of forcing himself to avoid the topic of his dream. It had taken on by now the quality of a secret, something to be guarded from infidel scorn, and yet there was the impulse, so often present in such cases, to lay it out, to spread it open before their jibes, to desecrate somehow the sacred terrible secret that rose within him until he felt threatened; like a glass about to overflow.

Invitations to his house now rarely brought acceptance and because of this he took perverse pleasure in dropping in unexpectedly upon his neighbors. He smiled when he saw the exasperated face at the window relaying his arrival to the others in the room and people reacted to him as people do to habitual drunkards who have previously been welcome; and to him it became a game with no reward other than the reassurance it gave him of his ability to choose in action, with no goal other than the postponement of his dream.

As for his work: he had long since abandoned it. It was such a private enterprise that it offered no solace. In the heat of late August he tried one night to drink himself into a stupor through which his dream would be unable to intrude. He sat in a chair

with the radio blaring inanities and methodically drank a bottle of whiskey; first in sips and then in great frantic gulps. It only made him laugh at the absurdity of the scene until his laughter annoyed him, shocked him almost as though it were alien to his life; because it was (he at last realized) something foreign to his life in the dream. This made him morose and it was in this condition for some reason that he determined that he, in his dream, lay upon a road. Thus the foliage: trees on either side of him, and the sensation that were he to rise, were he able to, he could look down a road in both directions and see or know, were he able to do either, where the road led to or from where it came. It was a simple discovery and it made him feel stupid that he had not surmised the truth before. The revelation and his annoyance sobered him and he went to bed with a feeling of anticipation for he was sure that this new knowledge would be carried over into his dream and when once again he found himself inert his consciousness would rise and he would be able to explore the scene within which he found himself.

But the dream that night was worse than ever for within it there was merely the souvenir of promised knowledge as to where he lay. In the morning, when he was able to reason once again, he realized that whatever he might discover concerning the dream when awake only increased the burden of his lack of identity within the dream itself.

Yet, having made one discovery, his mind despite all his efforts dwelt more and more upon the enigma of his dream. Inanely he would imagine what his dream identity might be. Was he asleep upon a roadside? Not entirely asleep but daydreaming perhaps? Napping after having walked to market? Drowsy from a glass or more of wine perhaps? Or could he be lying wounded along with other soldiers (this would account for the sense of other things in his own image being close) along a highway, shot down, perhaps even pierced by the arrows of the enemy riding by on panoplied horses. But then there was no pain such as the wounded feel. Was it after all no more than a foetal memory? and thus a matter to be threaded through the eye of psychiatry's needle. He still preferred to think not.

* * *

Down the asphalt road outside his house he would walk, trying in the sticky black pavement, in the seared green of the trees, in the very attempt itself to find some clue. All he could

be certain of after many such excursions was that the dream took place on a road; and that it took place in the past. Why he was convinced of the latter he could not positively say. Perhaps the horses had fostered the idea but he thought it was more than that. He knew that as he walked the road in front of his house it became more and more unlike, less and less related to the road in his dream. It came to him one day as a positive fact, how or why he could not say, that there was dust in his dream. It was as though he breathed the dust of his dream in his waking hours out there on the asphalt road. Of course the horses' hooves suggested dust but it was not that. He knew it as in a dark room one knows the location of a bed, a desk, a chair, the mirror.

That night he looked for dust in the dream or at least went to sleep with that intention but as always he was unable to concentrate his sensitivities and when the approaching horses vibrated within him, he was but dimly aware that now was the moment he should remember something, or that now it was the moment he had been aware of in the past. But there was no such process of thought; merely a blurred disquietude.

It was on the following day that he discovered by chance the truth of his identity. At first it made him laugh, it was so elemental; made him kick the thing that had revealed the truth down the roadway until it rolled off into the brush. He suddenly shouted with joy and then as suddenly stopped.

He had been walking, imagining himself as a boy back in the middle west. He put his walking stick over his shoulder as though it were a fishing pole. He whistled some simple tune out of his childhood. The words formed themselves and he found himself grinning as he sang, "Ever go afishin' on a hot summer's day, sit on the bridge and the bridge give away, your hands in your pockets and your pockets in your pants, and see the little fishes do the hootchy-kootchy dance?" Completely lost in his play, he stubbed his toe on a stone, smooth-rounded but larger than a pebble. Automatically he said, "Ouch!" but he said it, he realized with shock, not for himself but as though he were speaking for the injured stone. His play ended abruptly and with a blinding flash of revelation he knew that in his dream he was just such a stone as the one he had sent rolling down the road into the ditch. He shouted with relief and then, as the horror of the truth struck him, he became rigid. The explanation was so final, so desolate that he wished he had never happened on it.

From now on he ceased taxing his neighbors' hospitality. He closeted himself night and day within his house, reading avidly

and pathetically working out puzzles, computing inane statistics from columns of facts and figures; doing anything at all that would prove his ability to think and reason. He would look at the pictures on his walls, probing them, analysing them. He felt with loving and sensuous hands the carvings, fetishes and clay figures on his mantel, shelves and tables; always forcing the proof upon himself that he could see and touch, decide and remember. He held a milk bottle in his hand one morning visualizing all the processes through which man had forced it to perfection. Nature held a horror for him and the beauties of the fading trees and fiery zinnias seen through his windows dismayed him. A stone rough and lichenous, used as a door-stop, he picked up one day and started to throw through the window, back to the earth, but he reconsidered and took it down to the cellar where he beat it upon the concrete floor with a sledge hammer until it was crushed into grit and he worked into a sodden pulp of frenzy. And yet that night he dreamed again that he was a stone, a stone indistinguishable from any rounded stone that one might find upon a dusty country road.

And each night the period between the prelude to the dream and the point at which he first sensed the approaching horses steadily prolonged itself. And he would await each night for that vibration to endow him with something akin to sensibility and release him into consciousness.

September advanced. The hired girl went back to school or college or wherever she went. The neighbors returned to the city. No one thought of him very much. The editors of the magazine for which he had promised the article heard from those who had seen him during the summer that he had become impossible. They had even forgotten his dream. Provisions were delivered to his door and their carcasses carried away, mechanically and without curiosity.

His dream became more and more protracted. What first he had taken for a sense of memory within the dream he now thought more likely to be a dumb cold prescience in the stone upon the road, some intimation of evolution; something like man's pathetic belief in a better world or at least a better after-world. And yet within the dream, he assured himself, there seemed to be a promise of something already remembered and it was this lost function that was both reassuring and at the same time so disquieting and desolate. But he really didn't care any longer, couldn't really attempt to make head or tails of all this jumble of time and identity. Eventually the dream would cease

as suddenly as it had begun and until then he would live with himself, assuring himself that during his waking hours he still, as a man, had choice.

He began going to bed early, deceiving himself with the belief that the sooner he got the dream over with the sooner he could recommence his conscious life and, who could tell, perhaps the next night there would be no dream.

Late in September he went to bed one night at sunset. Like a victim he lay down and closed his eyes and waited. The dream came. For an eternity he lay in the road waiting for that something indefinable that he knew he should expect. Then finally the vibrations from a great distance. And again the eternity before they reached the pitch that meant the imminent sharp spark of contact, the reprieve. The horses (though in his dream they were still only a nameless force) were upon him now. The iron of the hoof struck him. Something stirred in anticipation within his minerality. But nothing happened; only the feeling in the cold stone that it should have turned into something else by now. The vibrations died away.

Within him somewhere, perhaps in that tiny speck of glistening quartz on his under side, something told him that what he had remembered he would become was forever lost; and that he would lie where he lay interminably with a feeling like that when a man has forgotten what the errand is a friend has asked him to do. He was to lie there with a feeling no deeper than that haunting and possessing his tedium for ever and ever.

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IPHIGENIA AT AULIS

A DANCE PLAY

Kenneth Rexroth

FIRST CHORUS, *two people*

SECOND CHORUS, *four people*

AGAMEMNON

IPHIGENIA

ACHILLES

TIME: *The Greek Heroic Age.*

PLACE: *The seawall above the Bay of Aulis*

At the back of the stage, a screen seven feet high and ten feet wide with two tones of grey, for sea and sky. Along the bottom of this screen is a step about one foot high. At the right and left are screens, seven feet high and four feet wide, decorated with black designs derived from the Chinese ideograms for the sun and moon—one on each screen, about five feet off the ground, about eight inches high. They should not look especially Chinese.

On the step, at right and left, sit the First Chorus. At the right is a young girl, dressed only in a short tight black wrapper, like a sarong, gaudily jewelled, highly painted, a street prostitute. At the left is a fat old man, with shaved head, wrapped in a white blanket, a small brass bowl beside him, a beggar. The First Chorus speak with great dignity and treat the principals with a certain condescension. All business with the principals is done by them.

The Second Chorus sit, two and two, along the walls on either side, in front of the screens. They are inconspicuously dressed, possibly in long blue gowns. They are the musicians, mob, commentators, prop men and sound effects. They should conduct

themselves with the nonchalance of their counterparts in the Chinese theater.

Iphigenia is dressed like the prostitute, but without the jewelry and makeup.

Achilles wears a white blanket, with his arms and chest bare, tied with a cord around his waist, the way Indians are supposed to wear blankets, but somewhat shorter. This is the same costume as the beggar's.

Agamemnon is dressed in a simplified version of a light-armed Greek soldier's costume, with a short sword and a fiddle-shaped shield. The sword is in a plain scabbard, has a cruciform hilt, looks rather like a child's wooden sword. In one lobe of the shield is the symbol for Taurus, in the other, the symbol for Scorpio, black on white, white on black, respectively. Agamemnon wears heavy boots, the rest are barefoot.

Iphigenia's red robe should completely envelope her. Achilles' should give the appearance of a military cape. Both are plain rectangles of very bright scarlet. Otherwise, there are no colors except black and white.

There are no other props.

If the play is given without a stage, or on the same level as the audience, the step may be dispensed with and the First Chorus sit on the floor. There is no curtain. At the beginning the choruses, the second leading, walk on, take their places, and begin. At the end, the players and choruses rise and file out, in "reverse precedence" like at Mass. Not only at the beginning and end, but throughout, the resemblance to Solemn High Mass should be marked.

At the beginning the stage is dark; on the screen, reaching from the painted horizon to the ground, is a path of light, the moon-path on the sea. There is a similar rectangle of light on the floor of the stage. The light on the screen is thrown from behind, that on the floor from directly overhead. Towards the end of the play, day breaks and the stage grows rapidly lighter; the last lights should come up suddenly, with an effect of dazzling brightness. The dances should be restrained, formal, very slow. Under no circumstances should they resemble the expressionist dance popular in America in the Thirties. They should largely be confined to the space defined by the path of light on the floor.

The make-up should be as formal as possible, or, much better, the principals and the First Chorus should wear masks and rope wigs, except for the beggar, who is completely bald.

If this play should be given in conjunction with others in the series, e. g. Phraedra, the same masks, or make-up, the same props, screens, costumes, and if possible, actors, should be used. I have some music for both plays. The instruments used are viola, flute, percussion—wood and drums—very little or no metal, and plucked strings—either an Irish harp, a zither, a p'i-p'a, or guitar. Records of Aoi n' Uye, Kakitsubata, Nishikigi, are in some university and conservatory collections and will soon be available again from Japan, and should give clues to the style of song, speech, accompaniment, and even, to an attentive ear, dance. Nishikigi, especially, is a masterpiece of subtle percussion.*

IPHIGENIA AT AULIS

CHORUS I No wind has blown for a month.

Under the moon the water
Is as still as ice, the light
Like a pavement on the sea,
Like snow.

The ships lie like stones.

Nothing moves in the stillness
But the stars in the rigid
Heaven.

The ships are frozen
In the warm midsummer sea.
The worms eat them and they rot.

The souls of men rot, frozen
In the sea of illusion.

CHORUS II This bay is a good harbor.
It doesn't freeze in winter.

There's something out there, moving,
Black in the moonlit water.

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KENNETH REXROTH

I see two black spots, like seals.
Those aren't seals. Those are people.
I can hear them call over
The surf; it is so quiet.
It is Iphigenia
And the young king, Achilles.
It's her. I can hear her laugh.
They play together like fish.
When they dive through the water,
Their bodies are black, and then
Flash in the moonlight, like fish.
One of them has disappeared.
There's only one black spot now.
They're swimming in each other's
Arms with their heads together.
They are coming ashore now.
How beautiful she is. Look.
Speak lower. They will hear you.

CHORUS I

Her wet thighs are all on fire.
They break the surf as proud as
Salmon move up waterfalls.
A halo envelops her.
Her shoulders prance in the spray,
Like young goats in the mountains.
Her legs are around his waist;
And their lips are together.
They stand at the water's edge,
Swaying, knotted together,
Like the sea tangle that sways,
Back and forth in the sea's wash,
In the place where the whales play.
He is lying on the sand.
She is standing over him,

KENNETH REXROTH

Shaking water from her hair.
The drops sparkle like fireflies.

She is dancing over him,
Whirling a whip of seaweed.

They have awakened the sea birds.
They fly around them crying,
Confused in the moonlight.

CHORUS II

Hark.
I heard the ring of metal
On stone. Someone is coming
Along the seawall.

It is
Agamemnon, the old king.
He has his old dog with him.
Watch him. Look how he stumbles.
Is he walking in his sleep?
Sleepwalkers never stumble.
He certainly acts confused.
Maybe he has been drinking.
He is an awful drunkard.

Agamemnon enters.

AGAMEMNON

What is that ring of stars on the skyline?
How bright they are. Is it nearly morning?

CHORUS I

The Necklace of Armetis.
It is midsummer midnight.

AGAMEMNON

I don't notice the stars much; but I think
One of them is brighter than usual.

CHORUS I

It is. When the heavens swing
Full circle, the Beardriver,
At midsummer, at midnight,
Crosses from darkness to light.
The Hunting Dogs drive the Bears
In a narrowing circle.

The axis of the world grinds
On the Dragon's writhing tail.
The Lion vomits the Sun.
The Yeoman of Artemis
Hands her necklace from the Moon
To the Sun; and a jewel
Bursts into flames.

It is said,
In each jewel in that necklace
You can see every other
Jewel reflected and itself
Reflected in every one.

AGAMEMNON I don't understand. It sounds ominous.

CHORUS I There are always things like that
Happening in the heavens.

AGAMEMNON How still it is. Even the birds are still.
Usually you can't hear them for the waves.
Now the surf is only a faint murmur.
It is a by-word to speak of the wind
As dying. I think, this time, it is dead.

CHORUS I Can't you sleep?

AGAMEMNON No. The glare of the moonlight
Outside my tent wakes me. And the quiet
Keeps me awake. I thought I heard the birds
Cry, and voices.

CHORUS I You did. The princess
And Achilles are down there
On the beach. They were swimming
In the moonlight.

AGAMEMNON How she loves to swim.
She'd spend all her time swimming and hunting
If she could. We used to swim together
When she was little, just a few years ago.
Now she has a lover to swim with her.
A girl turns to a woman overnight.
When she was born this dog was a puppy;
And they played together on a bearskin.
It was wonderful—two young animals.
Now he's such an old dog, he's almost blind.

Look, Rex, look at the moon. He doesn't know
 It's there. He smells my finger and whimpers.
 He can't understand a pointing finger.
 I don't suppose men are any wiser.
 I don't know one who can tell ends from means.
 Here we are, all Greece, crazy for a war
 That's none of our business. A lot of us
 Will die chasing a cuckold's fancy wife.
 Maybe none of us will ever get home.
 If we do, it won't be the same again.
 What if I gave the order to turn back?
 I wonder. Maybe the wind would blow then.
 We're going to pay a terrible price
 To get out of here otherwise. I know.
 I don't need any wars, I've had enough.
 I can imagine much better battles
 Than were ever fought. Do you know that I
 Have lain in bed whole nights, and watched
 armies
 March and countermarch around my big toe?
 I'm sure as much good came of those battles
 As any real ones I've ever fought in.

CHORUS I At any rate, less evil;
 And what was gained was soon lost.

The conjunctions of the world
 Are unstable by nature.

It is a foolhardy thing
 To throw the torch of action
 In the straw of consequence.

AGAMEMNON That's true. But it's a world of consequence.
 We are bound by the power of dead acts.
 And that power grows and grows, more and more,
 Until no man can see the end of it.
 Some day it will break down of its own weight.
 You live as best you can, though you can see
 No meaning in responsibility.
 You choose the greater or the lesser good.
 Warriors, politicians, and most kings are
 Kind to their families. Saints and saviors
 Deny their mothers and dare not marry.
 Once you've started, you can never turn back.

CHORUS I "In the turmoil of the waves
Of the world, let the heart learn
From the gull that sleeps alone
In the midst of the ocean."

AGAMEMNON Those soldiers have that sort of innocence.
What do they care about the agony
Of responsibility? You assume
The liability of the world's sin,
The sin I make as a man of affairs.
They assume nothing but the summer night.
The poor enjoy moonlight and perfumed air
In strict proportion to their poverty,
Whether it is voluntary or not.

CHORUS I You're wrong. But I won't argue.
Agamemnon goes out.

CHORUS II Look at that old hypocrite.
Everybody knows he's been
His own daughter's lover since
The day she was big enough
To take him. She's plenty bold
Enough about it. It's no
Secret. Now he's marrying
Her off for "reasons of state."

The rich and powerful do
Whatever suits their fancy.
They'd hang one of us if they
Caught us doing the same things.

They say he's in love with one
Of Achilles' concubines.

I think he sees Achilles
Becoming too strong for him
In this war, unless he has
Someone there to keep him down.

O, she'll keep him down all right.
She'll be the one'll give orders.
He'll be lucky if she leaves
Him strength to carry them out.

If she wanted to weaken me,
I wouldn't mind it a bit.

Iphigenia and Achilles enter.

ACHILLES Do I love your body's beauty,
 Its fair harmony of movement,
 The fire of your eyes, and the sweet
 Melody of your varying voice?
 Do I love the different perfumes
 Of your breasts and armpits and thighs,
 And the honey of your mouth and sex,
 And your limbs that clasp me about?
 I love more your secret splendor,
 Melody, fragrance and sweetness,
 And your secret, hidden embrace.
 Space cannot contain that shining,
 Time bear away that melody,
 That sweetness ever be consumed,
 No weariness ever sunder
 The embrace in which we two cling.

IPHIGENIA I have only love, nothing else.
 I feel as though there were nothing
 Else in me but you. I have no
 Being but what fills me with you,
 Like a mirror filled with the sun.
 I see world upon wor'd in me,
 Like diamonds in that sunlight.

ACHILLES Love is a terrifying thing.
 I can feel it spread out from us
 In a flood deep as this moonlight,
 Drowning the mountains of the world.

IPHIGENIA The fish do not drown in the sea,
 Nor the birds fall that tread the air.
 Gold does not turn black in the fire.
 It does not rust away with time.
 The burning years and wasting fire
 Only make it shine more brightly.
 Everything lives by its nature.
 I live in you and in your love,
 As pure spirits live in vision.

ACHILLES One should trust the power of love
 When one feels it inside oneself.
 Still, it's a frightening thing to have.

IPHIGENIA I can see now that what I thought
 Was myself was just a desert
 Before you came to me; and what
 I thought were plants were only stones.
 You plowed me with your sharp manhood,
 Rained on me with your sweet manhood,
 Shone on me with your hot manhood,
 And comforted me in the night
 With the dew of your tenderness;
 And all the pain of my shut heart
 Has broken out into thousands
 And thousands of flowers. O love,
 Take me, hold me in the drenching
 Moonlight. Hold me. I am perishing.

ACHILLES We can never perish. It is
 Unlove and unhate that give form
 To phantasms of time and space.
 See how the moonlight falls out of
 The immense sky, as pure as love,
 And freezes the waves of the sea.
 Remember, all the waves of all
 The oceans that have come ashore
 On all the beaches of the world
 Since time began, and ever shall,
 Have a number; and there shall come
 A time that number shall be totalled.
 And so these doomed few feet of flesh,
 Mingled together in one fire,
 Each self knowing in the other,
 Hold, and hold back, and sum up, all
 The world's origin and decay.

IPHIGENIA Think. This is the last night. This is
 All. O love. I cannot bear it.
 This war will last for years, and I
 Will have nothing to keep me warm
 In the cold north but these hours
 Falling away through the long nights.
 No one but yellow savages,
 Clothed in the mangled skins of beasts.
 Hold me back. Fill me with yourself.
 Leave me with yourself inside me,
 Our compound flesh a walking

Memory. Let the uncanny
Calm of our lust's vision take form.
Lover. There is only tonight.
O sweet lover. I wish I were
Prolific as fish in the sea,
Or the teeming flies of the air.
The glory that doubles itself
In us can manifest itself
Only in what streams between us,
Wrung from the knot of love.

ACHILLES

So late.
There is so little time left us.
I have come to love you so late.
All the past and all the future
Are consumed in love more ancient
Than all the past, new beyond all
The future. I do not believe
That this present will ever pass;
That the sun which steals upon us,
Beneath our feet, can steal us from
Each other.
Don't go. Stay with me.
Let Troy keep that pink bitch in heat.
Let other vagrants seduce her.
Her life will end, covered with scabs,
A bawd amongst barbarians.
Your foolish uncle will only
Lose her again if his betters
Buy her back for him with their blood.
A born whore and a born cuckold—
Why should good men die for them?

IPHIGENIA

No.
It's not circumstance that matters,
But the purity of the deed.
The affairs of men are always
Trivial, and the important
Is always sacrificed to them.
The goddess will release the winds
If I devote myself to her
For ten years as priestess in the North.
Only I can free the Greek ships.
I do not care if they sail out

And founder, and never reach Troy;
My part will be done. When I am
Ready, the sails of my ship will
Fill with wind. The fleet can follow
Me or not, just as they see fit.

CHORUS II The old king is coming back.

IPHIGENIA I want to talk to my father
Alone. I may never see him
Again. I'll come back to you soon.
We'll be together till daybreak.

ACHILLES Hurry. We have so little time.

IPHIGENIA I won't be long. Kiss me once more.
Achilles goes out.

IPHIGENIA He is innocent as a child.

CHORUS I The beauty of the warrior
Is the wisdom of the child.

IPHIGENIA Am I beautiful? Am I wise?

CHORUS I You are very beautiful;
Beautiful with the other
Face of wisdom, the end of guile.
The world has been found and lost
In corruption since you were
As spotless as he is now.
The egg's unbroken oval
Is his mathematics, and yours
The graph of the skull's sutures.

IPHIGENIA I am as capable as you
Of oblivious love, or you
Of sacrifice.

CHORUS I Who doubts it?
We are only reflections
Of the warrior and the queen.

They are images of us.

Consequence dogs your father.
You know it is only
Possibility seen backwards.

KENNETH REXROTH

You will act past consequence,
Choose past possibility,
Know past the meaning of truth,
As you have desired past act.

You know what you are doing.
Only the beautiful know.

That is a definition
Of beauty, perhaps the best

IPHIGENIA

I am sacrificing myself
To myself, to unlock the vast
Waterwheel of blind history,
And let it turn in my heart's blood.
And I do it without effort,
Or very little. If it cost
Me nothing, I would be a myth,
Not a woman.

Iphigenia goes out.

CHORUS I

The sands have
Run out in the hour glass.
It is the moment before
The absorbed reader starts from
His book and turns the egg full
Of dust to the top.

CHORUS II

Wake up.
Here he comes again, snooping.
I wish he'd get a hot boy
To keep him warm in bed. Then
Maybe he'd keep his old nose
Out of other folk's business.

If I had on my conscience
All the stuff he has on his,
I don't think I'd ever sleep.

Watch her now, how she'll snuggle
Up to him. They'll put their heads
Together and hatch some scheme
To swindle poor Achilles.

He's got a head of his own.
He'll get the better of them yet.

He's a great man, Achilles.
All his soldiers worship him.
He eats just the same rations
As they do.

The Myrmidons
Are all equals. He's only
The leader. Nobody is
Better than anybody
Else with them. That's why they're called
Myrmidons. They're like the ants.
Each man does his proper job,
And draws from the common fund.

Ants have queens.

But they don't rule.
They perpetuate the race.

She's pretty crazy about
Achilles. I wonder what
The old man would do if he
Thought she would ever tell him
She's been her father's mistress.

He'd probably murder her.

Achilles is too good a man
For that old fox and his pup.

Iphigenia and Agamemnon enter.

AGAMEMNON You should have told him. He's bound to find out.

IPHIGENIA It will be too late then. But how
Will he discover it? No one
Will know but you and my own maid.
The fleet will sail and him with it.
The war will be over before
He learns I was not on the ship
Which first turned to the wind. Besides,
He'll not see the end of this war.
Beauty like his dies violently.
His body will be dragged in dust,
Black with blood, and battle-trampled,
Till it has turned to potter's clay.

AGAMEMNON Is that surmise or prophecy?

- IPHIGENIA Neither.
It is fact. I know Fate's logic
And the selling price of Fortune.
- AGAMEMNON It may be. The whole thing terrifies me.
Why do you have to involve me in it?
What if you're wrong? Suppose nothing happens?
- IPHIGENIA I am not wrong. It will happen.
I can trust you to be silent.
Also I trust your love for me.
- AGAMEMNON Why not use Achilles? He loves you more.
- IPHIGENIA Loves me enough to cut my throat?
Hasn't life taught you anything?
- AGAMEMNON I know. I know. I want no part of it.
It's three months ago, the first day of spring,
The wind died as we reefed sail in this place.
You came to me that night and told me why,
And what must be done. I haven't slept since.
Everyone thinks I have dysentery.
For three months I have been dying of dread.
Now my courage is all gone. I'm afraid
Of everything, of you, of Achilles,
Of my own guards. Even my old dog scares me
When he growls and quivers and dreams of bears.
Do you know what frightens me most of all?
The indifferent gaze of that beggar
And whore who sit together day and night,
There on the seawall. I can't keep away
From them. I spend hours talking to them.
I'm afraid of their passionless faces.
It's not worth it. We can burn the ships
And march overland, conquering the country
As we go. This is the greatest army
In the world. We can make it an empire.
They would follow Achilles anywhere.
Why waste the youth of Greece to ruin Troy?
You could be a queen of queens, mightier
Than Minos or the Egyptian Pharaohs.
I would rather we turn back. You're worth more
Than Helen, more than any victory.

- IPHIGENIA I have been the Queen of Heaven
And Earth, the Living Artemis.
The Moon will turn full at sunrise.
In her name I shall wed the Sun,
And vanish in their doubled light.
- AGAMEMNON That's fine for you. I'm left with guilty hands.
- IPHIGENIA You are that expedient thing—
A king of the world. Can you be
More or less guilty than you are?
Let my blood be on my own head.
Besides, this is nothing but talk.
Try it. Order them to turn back.
You know no one would obey you.
You are only the first amongst
Equals. Suppose you persuaded
The other kings, you know the ranks
Would revolt and find new leaders.
As soon turn back a falling stone
As wake the awful sloth of war.
Of course I'm worth more than victory;
Any life is, more than any
Victory. The poorest sentient
Life is worth more than all the states
That ever fought or ever will.
What does that prove? I die by my
Own values. And the ships sail out
In the wind of my deed to ends
That have as little to do with
Good and evil as the dust motes
My breath disturbs in the sunlight.
They'd say it was expedient
That one die for the good of all
If you want it made public, ask them.
You'll soon find out. Ask that soldier.
- AGAMEMNON I know. Certainly, I know what he'd say.
But you've no right to treat me as a means
To your salvation. I've myself to save.
The power of Artemis lives in you.
You can command the wind if you want to.
- IPHIGENIA The maneuvers of the navy,
Like the conquest of a city,

Are the concerns of the power
Of a king, not mine, nor the god's.
Make my ends yours. You'll not be used.

AGAMEMNON Can I undo a lifetime's means and ends
Between now and daybreak? I inhabit
Another universe. It was too late for that
Before I was born. Perhaps she'll consent
If we go through the acts of ritual.
The appearances would be satisfied.
She could snatch you out from under the knife
At the last moment. She has done such things
Before. She would do anything for you.

IPHIGENIA The hawk dies rather than eat grain.
There is a moral universe
In which the whole contains the parts,
And each part contains the whole.
Do you want me to ask someone
Else?

AGAMEMNON No.

IPHIGENIA Then be quiet. Hold me
In your arms and kiss me. I am
A child you are always leaving
To go to war. Always kissing
Goodbye, with your sword in your hand.

AGAMEMNON I can think of nothing worth such a price.

IPHIGENIA Be still. You bought and paid for me
When you begot me. I am all
The girls your soldiers have butchered
In all the wars you've ever fought;
All the slattern camp followers
Who have given them the comforts
Of filthy bodies and rank wine,
And sealed their loves with sores and lice.
I am the babies they fathered
In haste, and died, and never saw.
Artemis—the Net of the Fish
Of Heaven—I am the fleshy
Net in which you have caught the world.
Twenty years ago black serpents
Writhed in the Sun, and I came out

Of you a spasm of ecstasy.
 When the Moon's disc slides into full,
 And her face becomes featureless
 As a pure mirror, I return.
 We lie here tonight with my head
 In your lap, my hands in your beard;
 We are the oldest kind of lovers.
 There are two eggs in me must hatch
 As apparitions in the sky—
 Twin children of the beginning
 And end of the wisdom of war.

They dance. The dance comes slowly and powerfully to climax. Agamemnon steps into the darkness and Achilles takes his place. The dance is resolved and Iphigenia and Achilles come forward.

IPHIGENIA

In your body lies all my joy.
 My heart is breaking like a shell.
 I feel my courage drain from me.
 I will be alone and never
 Hear your voice in the long winter,
 As I sit and think of your ways.
 I will never see the young hawk
 Wheel in heaven, nor the wolfhound
 And the stag running together,
 But the memory of your grace
 Will come upon me and stun me.
 The days will be long without you,
 As they vanished like the closing
 Of an eye when I was with you.
 I was never weary with you,
 Achilles. I shall be weary
 Without you. My eyes will go blind
 Staring after your memory.

ACHILLES

I shall come to you when the war
 Is over, when Troy has fallen,
 And the world is quiet again.
 I shall sail northward, seeking you,
 When Helen returns to the Greeks.
 Love betrayed has brought this trouble
 On the world; and the faith we keep
 Will last beyond all the ruin

Of that sly, rose-garlanded woman.
A love beyond time can suffer
No parting. Those who love beyond
The world, space cannot separate.

Very slowly they begin to dance.

ACHILLES When I lie in your arms it seems
A cloud of fire comes over us,
And lightning shines along the ground;
The earth moves as I enter you,
And the corpuscles of our blood
Change to coruscations of light;
As I look in your entranced eyes,
I see mirrored there a glory
Beyond the illusion of the world.
I merge with its mirrored image,
And pass from glory to glory.

IPHIGENIA Every part of me that is not
Lost in you has melted away.
All my senses are lost in you.
I have no speech to speak of you.
I am drowned in you like the sea.
Nothing is within me but you.
Nothing is without me but you.
I have fallen into the Sun,
Into the starless heart of dark.

Their dance gives an impression of terrific violence under tremendous restraint. Though they exhaust themselves in climax after climax, the dance never becomes rapid, but remains extremely slow. The stage is darkened, then grows light again. They lie quietly on the steps while the Chorus speaks, and then come forward.

CHORUS I She has conceived twice tonight.

Nourished beyond time, her womb
Grows in the crystal heaven,
And in the earth's iron heart,
And opens in time's fulness.

KENNETH REXROTH

Molten rock boils from the earth.
Comets wander in heaven.

The shifting balance quivers
To a stop; and her twin sons
Walk abroad on earth and sky.

One wears jewels in his hair.
He is clothed in golden gauze.
Dragons bear up his swift feet.
Burning coals are in his hands.

One is clothed in webs of stars.
And the Pole stars crown his head.
Glowing planets shoe his feet.
Cataclysms glove his hands.

The diamond of compassion
And wisdom grows forever
In the bowels of the earth.

Unmoving and unmoved, the star
Of benevolence and light
Shines in heaven's still center

CHORUS II

A cloud past over the moon.

Did it? I was asleep.

Look.

There it is, off to the west.
A little, floating, white cloud.

I was falling asleep, too,
But the shadow woke me up.

I wonder if it means wind.

It means something. It didn't
Climb in the sky by itself.

IPHIGENIA

That is all. Leave me quickly now.
The sky pales. It is almost day.
Go to your ship. Make sure they are
Ready. You must be first to sail
After me. Embrace me once more.
Tell me you love me and then go.

When the Sun stands on the Earth's lips
 A wind from the Moon will hurl me
 To my responsibility.
 You must be quick. It will not blow
 Forever. It will be a long
 Time before this chance comes again.
 Lover. It is for the glory
 We have created together
 That I act. There is no other
 Way it can be made manifest.
 You must obey without question.

ACHILLES I act only as your creature
 I have given you my will. You
 Have taken my understanding.
 Hereafter, I move in the world
 As our memory incarnate,
 Like one who wa'ks a rope of dreams.

IPHIGENIA O sweet, sweet Achilles, only
 Our shadows will meet again, thrown
 On the fragile screen of sleep.

ACHILLES Night after night, to start awake,
 Grope in the dark, and find nothing.

IPHIGENIA O lover. Stop. It is not right.
 We are letting the dream destroy
 Reality. We sleep in dark
 Apart, wake in light together.
 Never forget that. On the plain
 Of Troy, in the squalor of war,
 Never forget, the ruinous
 Face of Helen is illusion.
 I conquer Helen forever.
 When you dream in a cloud of battle,
 Open your eyes on my face.
 Talk no more. We have said enough.
 I have made two red robes for us
 To meet this morning's sunrise in.
 I will dress you in yours and you
 Help me with mine.

ACHILLES You are weeping.

IPHIGENIA Yes. The dawn flickers in the sky,
 As we help each other to dress,
 As we have so many mornings.
 Dear, I am only a young girl.
 Now I am clothed in your heart. You
 Are clothed in mine. We cannot part.
 Stand there and let me look at you.
 I kiss you goodbye. Go now. Go.

Achilles goes out.

IPHIGENIA Stand forth. Prepare me for pure act.
 Wash me. My lips and thighs and breasts.
 I go to a blazing bride bed.

CHORUS I Your breasts are two doves. Your eyes
 Are doves' eyes. Between your thighs
 Is a nest of nightingales.

IPHIGENIA Anoint me. Put perfume and oil
 On all my passages of sense,
 On hands and feet that did my will,
 On the sex with which I loved.

CHORUS I Your sandaled feet are lovely.
 Love is quick in your hands. Love
 Swoons in the wine of your sex.

IPHIGENIA Bind my feet with tangled flowers,
 The summer flowers of the Sun.
 Weave flowers in my hair, the white
 Moon flowers that waste in the dawn.

CHORUS I Feet that glided like swallows,
 Hair that shimmered like moonlight,
 You burn like the morning star.

IPHIGENIA Draw my red robe close about me.
 Seal me away in my own fire.
 Crown me with laurel and flowers
 Of marjoram. I conquer Troy.
 I marry the burning daylight.

 My father waits at the headland.
 The sea turns white before sunrise.

CHORUS I She stands before her father.
The first gold ray of the sun
Shines on the knife.
Her robe falls.
She is enveloped in fire.
Her beauty is terrible,
More beautiful than ranked ships,
And drawn swords, than the forest
Of spears, than the long banners
That lift as the wind begins.
The knife is black with her blood.
Heaven has taken her. She
Has gone into the bright world.
The flames crawl over Troy's walls.
Asia falls into ruin.
Aeneas and Odysseus
Wander, lost in a new world
Helen dies in a brothel.

THE ROOM

William Burford

THE SCENT OF THE ROOM surprises him, as a long pocketed, perfumed handkerchief, pulled out, surprises. Then, after attacking his nostrils, the room attacks his eyes. Marlon sees that he is in a jungle of mahogany furniture and velvet drapes whose texture glimmers like the leaves of a Venus-fly-trap. His gaze leaps, a rifle to readiness, after silent creepings becoming indistinguishable forms in the tropical intricacy of the room, whose accoutrements create a confusion which prevents the eye from resting upon or picking out a particular object. Marlon struggles constantly to keep his sight sharp, to cut to the core of the room.

Advancing, afraid of stepping on a lizard, Marlon raises his hand to rub his eyes. At the very moment his fingertips touch his lids, panthers leap across his view. Continuously they spring, without moving from their fixed positions, without loosing their hind paws from the clutch of the jungle floor. Their fixed motion, the epitome of everything in the room, monopolizes Marlon's eyes. He is relieved to have a sign of savagery, clear, to follow. He remembers that the panthers are the posts of the bed on which his mother lies, which he must have neared in his walk through the jungle. The borders of this bed blend into the darkness of the room. Only the space between the panther-posts gives Marlon any conception of the bed's immensity. He moves to examine them.

From the darkly varnished, mahogany jaws of the panther nearest his face, a river of black grain meanders beneath the beast's chin, disappears, and then suddenly resumes its course on his right foreleg, running to an end amidst his claws. At first sight, Marlon imagines this streak to be the blood of a recent kill; but upon more intimate inspection, he determines that this irregular stream has been dry and coagulated for some time.

The black grain of the streak does not blend smoothly into its brown surroundings, but is cracked from its edges which have risen above the general surface of the panther's body. These beasts have not eaten for many years, but their bodies were carved at the moment of gorging. They appear to be feeding upon food which has ceased to exist but for which they still spring. A potted plant would be devoured by the accoutrements of this room.

And his mother, whom Marlon knows to be lying on the bed, supported by the static tension of frustrated but forever straining muscles, what is her nourishment? Marlon has never had a meal with his mother; and he cannot picture her eating except in a beastlike manner, tearing her raw food apart, her fingernails watchful claws preventing the miraculous escape of any section of the carcass. But the meat never reaches her mouth. Relentlessly harpies snatch it from her grasp. Her lust has burned away like tallow whatever fleshiness she once possessed, and so shrunk her skin that it resembles a hide, stretched by the frame of her skeleton to dry in the sun. Her head is a head preserved by cannibals, stuck on the stick of her spine. They worship her head, for she was one of them, slaughtered in the process of a jest.

Marlon cannot yet discern her form on the bed, but he senses her eyes around him, brown eyes at first gently pulsing beneath the skin of her temples and now frantically throbbing as a knife edge is drawn across them, filling his eardrums with their tom-tom beating, their inexhaustible blood overflowing the edges of the bed and dripping into the reservoir of his cupped hands for him to dash over his face. It is cool to his feverish forehead.

Marlon struggles to control his nervousness at these meetings with his mother, but only the first notes of his own voice can restore his calm and drown the pounding of his pulse. As he approaches her torpid form on the bed, he avoids the scrutiny of her eyes so that his greeting will surprise her. His hands touch a cloth which he feels his eyes have previously distinguished in the drapes. Pressing to a pulp its petal texture, he realizes he is holding the canopy of her bed, and therefore has reached his destination.

Marlon has developed a skill in creeping through this room. So breathlessly, fearing to disturb the very lethargy of the air, so silently does he move over the pile carpet, that his mother is usually unable even to sense that he has approached. His silence is phenomenal, since his presence in her bedroom is infrequent. Only on occasions of crisis, as his father calls them, is it

necessary for him to visit his mother's sanctuary. And yet, in the darkness, he never collides with a chair.

Norma's care is sufficient for the ordinary vicissitudes of growing from childhood to adolescence. Carolyn Royall never enters the nursery except under cover of night, when her children's eyelids are closed. Only Norma knows when she makes these nocturnal visits, and Norma will never tell.

Marlon's eyes reach the gold emblem woven into the exact center of his mother's bed. Its stitches seem to work their way through the red velvet background, the mattresses, the floor of the room, and the stone foundations of the palace. The unicorn, whose horn impales an "R," sits at the center of the earth. His mother bought this coat-of-arms from an Italian count, along with his palace and his bed. Marlon believes that his mother wishes she had also bought the man, a Count whom she would not consider out of place lying with her on the gold emblem, an adventurer of ancient Latin blood, brown arms, negro's neck and groin, and muscled stomach atop his white mother. Marlon regrets that he is not the conception of this imagined pair.

His gaze is progressing along the gold threads of the embellished "R" when it strikes a white taper of flesh which he realizes is his mother's finger. Freezing, like a hound who sees the prey, Marlon speaks.

"Mother, I am here." His words strike him as being strangely hilarious. He is conscious of their traveling slowly through the air, conducted by a rod of lead from his mouth at the edge of the bed where he stands, across the field of gold-splashed velvet, through his mother's hair, and finally to her ear. He sees a slight fluttering of her finger make a crease in the velvet, like a child's lip on a ripe fig, betraying her surprise at hearing his voice.

"Marlon?" She is not quite positive of his identity and desires another sample of his voice. Her eyes are not yet turned on him.

"Yes, Mother." With these words she seems satisfied it is her son who is speaking, for she moves her head until her eyes are visible to him. This turn of the head is entirely independent of her body. The head can be a freshly severed one, rolling over in the basket that accepts it from the guillotine blade. Marlon is aware that he is staring at his mother's head as if he needs glasses, for at the same time his eyes are on her hand. She may notice his strain and give instructions that an eye doctor be brought to examine him.

"Marlon, my darling, you gave me such a scare this afternoon. You know it would kill Mother if anything should happen to you. That tower seems erected for a fatal fall." A monotone of practiced pathos so pervades her voice that these words are lifeless. She attempts a smile at the end of them, but her lips will not spread.

"Yes, Mother, I know. Daddy tells me that if I ever go up there again, you and he will be very angry with me. I feel so badly over upsetting you that I promise I shall never do it again."

"That's Mother's good boy. And Mother isn't angry with you any more. I'm only thinking of you all the time. I could never stay mad at my boy. Your father simply doesn't understand you as I do, does he, darling?" She says these words knowing that his father is listening on the other side of the door.

"No, Mother."

Part of the hair, combed to protect her pocked cheek, falls out of place. Marlon's eyes, accustomed now to the gloom, fix themselves upon the exposed cheek, straining to distinguish which is skin and which is shadow. A sickening, as from sour milk, comes over him. With the suddenness of prophecy, the horror of being deformed by this same disease pictures itself to his mind. His mother is unaware of her disarrangement and consequently of the direction of his gaze. She continues to lie limply upon her bed, like a woman who has just struggled through childbirth and feels that she has irretrievably lost a part of herself.

Marlon believes that his mother must have hated to bear two children, that she would have preferred to drop their bodies like two turds between her legs. She would have preferred to carry his father's sperm forever as a painless, almost weightless little grain of pleasure inside herself. His father must have tricked her in the fire of the night, Marlon thinks, even though he knows that at the time of marriage his mother had passionately desired his father. Perhaps her sickness is that she has never had enough of him.

"Darling, has Norma been taking good care of you? Has she been using the lemon rinse on your face? You aren't sleeping with a pillow, are you?"

"Everything is fine, Mother. Do you want to see Daddy now?"

She looks at him, knowing that he wants to escape from her. She can say nothing that will keep him.

"All right, dear, goodbye. Mother's feeling too bad for a kiss today." This last is a little formality of hers. She realizes that Marlon knows a kiss between the two of them is impossible. She is as afraid for him to touch her as he is afraid of catching her skin disease. But both know that it is not contracted by physical contact.

Mother and son have attained the assurance of professional actors. They sense that all objects are their audience. But in their mind, they abandon their roles. They know that long practice gives them the power to snap up their parts at the first moment of danger. Marlon has read as much about skin diseases as his mother. He realizes it is a matter of blood, not flesh. "Blood, not flesh" are words in his mind at this very instant. His mother's affliction serves as an excuse for unnaturalness that would exist even if her original beauty were not destroyed. He remembers that he has never been kissed by his mother.

"Goodbye, I hope you'll be better tomorrow." Marlon turns and walks away from her bed less silently than he approached it.

Thus, in the sitting room, his father is given warning. He is scrutinizing a portrait, his back turned to his wife's bedroom door, when Marlon opens it. Seeing the over-composure of his father's back, which tells him his father's ear has recently been at the keyhole, Marlon slams the door. The back twitches.

Suddenly, Marlon wishes his father would take hold of him and whip him until he would never dare to slam a door again. But, long ago, both Marlon and his mother let his father know that even the idea of whipping is presumptuous. Marlon's wish leaves him as quickly as it came.

"Daddy, Mother would like to see you now." Marlon thinks of adding, "in her room," to taunt his father, who has a slight lisp, whose "R's" come out "W's," whose "rooms" are "wombs." But Marlon does not taunt him. He leaves him standing in the sitting room, mute, looking shorter than his six feet.

In the hallway, Marlon pauses to lean his forehead against a wall and complain to the stone, "My father's 'R's' come out 'W's.' He strikes his forehead against the stone to help himself to weep.

Mr. Harry Royall walks across the sitting room and closes the door to the hall. His son, usually methodical, has left it ajar. Mr. Royall closes it because he feels the need of moving, of doing something with his hands. It seems foolish to him that he should stand stock-still in the center of the sitting room. He is trying to

decide whether to knock on his wife's bedroom door or to enter without any plea. He remembers when she first instructed him to knock, and when his knocks became pleas. He thinks that today he will end all the oddness. But, by the time he reaches the door in question, once more the same small crisis overwhelms him. He knocks, a tired echo of his son striking his head against the stone wall of the way to the room.

THREE POEMS

A NEW GOLIATH

The Giant stares about the sky and spies
No one, nothing, not one face above Him
Frowning sure stature of some greater greatness.
Shadows on the land strike less of awe
Than slaughter's fallen forms. No man before
The sun is longer than He, and thus at length
The sun is said to be the slow sweep of His eye;
The size, at highest noon, precisely of His ire.
It rises lower than His sleep and sets
Below His supper. In between it is his eye.

There is another view, though, of the world
Than this Goliath's, another in-between
Of moon and star, moonlight and starlight,
Higher by a darkness than the sun, more
Mortal traveller who slides, kinglike,
Out of His day; not fading, stationary
As the little man, into the welcome reign
Of dawn. Oh night! you fatal interlude
Whose each star is a stone that throws
Down giants, kindness comes from your sling.

The severed head of the terrible Philistine
 Wears not anguish, but a smile.
 He found, like one who looks for love
 Up in the sky, love at his feet;
 And he bent his forehead to the accurate
 Stone. His is the age-new tale of those who
 Lose their heads from love. Go, dark giant,
 Down through legend such a death. You step
 'Mongst stars your brow, torn cloudnight, bore.
 Your eye, a moon with man, is now your wound.

*MID-CENTURY**

Here, held by our hands, stands the century
 Whose hooves wrote rampage on the valley.
 The lariat, we swing, of learning pulled him high;
 Led him up the track the packhorse, time,
 Has ever bucked off his burden along
 And left littered with wrecked legends and laws.
 We have been sweepers, and chasers of runaway steeds.
 But hear! On this hill, at last, the century
 Champs to be ridden. "I am of age," the bit rings.
 "Sit, men, where the dead are strapped and the living."

The age, like the day and the hill, is half-sunned;
 And which is shadow and which is light becomes
 A fear. We act the white and black of love.
 One throat cries violence to the other's hush.
 The last is stupor's part? The first, magnificence
 Still grand enough to murder? We must begin
 To know our end. Would we see shadow shine
 And see light dull? Now must the mind decide.
 The heart's a show-horse has pranced us back
 To hollow Troy. Heart we have not lacked.

The scholar tolled to chapel, and the athlete—
 Being beast, we are inclined to awful dreams
 Of our undoing by a still sinful species.
 We pray our souls may not our bodies leave,
 Our bells, for forms heard stirring in our walls,
 For teeth whose creeping baby creed is *Gnaw*.

*Read on Class Day at Amherst College, June 10, 1949.

But hear! The termite is the pillar's germ
And the plague of wood. Listen with the intellect. Heard
There, whatever's grandeur rears and tells us 'Ride,'
Who sit the horse and the hill with a majesty of mind.

*RABBIT'S FOOT**

The tomboy, unhelmeted like a blown-locks hero,
aims into bluebonnets, intent to bee-bee
an imaginary monster; slay it; or at least
make it rear up from its lair wildeyed,
high rhinoceros in April's galed green meadow—
for her to fable to her elders, await
on their long veranda with a view of her,
small huntress in the deep scene. They lick
for teeth gone from their gums, to savour some
of their young one's wonder, or a tender meat.

The most she bags is rabbit, not talleared,
toughlegged jack, just soft cottontail
all white Easter shames. Midst the new blooms
its tiny twitching can not move memorially
as much as the wind did, it lies with a red dot
where the shot, copper coal that its belly
pumps, struck between the eyes; pumps
a bellows to brighten this bright beauty mark
as though it is the final coal of the fire,
life; and its dulling, the deep chill of death.

Oh the tomboy, if still she had the knack,
would weep. She rushes the rabbit
in her hands, up the earth's slow incline
she, stalking, had stepped painstakingly down;
rushes it to her elders who she'd heard knew
wondrous herbs and juices for health. But age,
to the witch with kitchen utensils, delivers
the spring's first game for change into
a fancy dish, cottontail to rhinoceros.
The foot, a root in her dark dearthly hand, is fruitless.

*An earlier version of this poem was published under the title, *Big Game*, in the *Southwest Review*, Spring, 1949.

THREE POEMS FROM JAPAN

MONOTONOUS SOLID

Kitasono Katue

A tortoise's
egg's
burst
in a mirror
burst of summer
melancholy's
shadow's
burst

that
foam's
cylinder's
wings
or
that
cloud's
slide

my place
of a drop
and
tragedy's
stripes
and
solitary neck's
ring

the
perpendicular
the
silver white
the
illusion
the
burst

fancy's
face's
curve's
dark chin's
stiff solitude

the voice of
desire
flows in
the olive avenue
a flying day
for flies
as well
so speedy

white cylinder's
distance's
needle
water's
bread's
needle
the leaden moon
snubbing a leaden flag

dream's
butterfly's
burst
heated arms
that still smell
coquettishly
on
a smashed plate

KITASANO KATUE

burst of death
inside of
a black glassbottle
star's
water's
dahlia's
such
visible burst

POEM

Ueda Toshio

Desist from thoughtlessly exciting the nigger
Who wears a gimcrack necklace
In the burning atmosphere.
Do not try to convert him
To Catholicism now in vogue.
Even I shudder at the burial-service
Which inters the golden head,
The fragile wine-cask,
On the lonesome sands with coco-palms.
O sublime roaring of the beast of prey!
O tantalus music, primeval and savage!
Instead of this wild art,
Supreme is the melody of love;
The Hebrew tales are but tales of it in metaphor.
Though it may be an enigma
To the ear of the full-blossomed negress,
Love is the trumpet of heaven;
It is a cup of ecstasy
To the mouths of animals.
Dance at Bacchanalia on the Island of Paradise
When the whole island seethes
With that drums' sound
Which stirs up the young blood of creatures!
Oh, dance on
Till on the day of cataclysm
All is drowned
In the raging flood,
The Hand of Terror!

POEM

Vada Toshio

It is a gorgeous nightfall.
Three hens, a bull,
A couple of small pigs,
And a lion who has lately turned an atheist:
The prayer to God of this holy family of mine is,
"Bourgeois and demons and death,
Destroy them all.
Grant us, O Lord, freedom!"

Bury yourself under the burning sand!
Plunge into confused music!
It is none other than you
That complacently take shame for honour.
Here is no golden urn
To bury the ruined sun,
Nor does descend from heaven the panther
Whose teeth can crush the black sun.
O immortal nigger
Chained to the ignominy of this negro art,
Quivering like the phenix
In the desolate space!

THREE POEMS

Lorine Niedecker

I rose from marsh mud,
algae, equisetum, willows,
sweet green, noisy
birds and frogs

to see her wed in the rich
rich silence of the church,
the little white slave-girl
in her diamond fronds.

In aisle and arch
the satin secret collects.
United for life to serve
silver. Possessed.

* * *

Don't tell me property is sacred!
Things that move—yes!—
cars out rolling through the country,
how they like to rest

on me—beer cans and cellophane
on my clean-mowed grounds.
Whereas I'm quiet... I was born
with poor eyes and a house.

* * *

LORINE NIEDECKER

Sunday's motor cars
jar the house.
When I'm away on work-days
hear the rose-breast.
Love the night, love the night
and if on waking it rains:
little drops of rest.

TRANSGRESSION

Lynette Roberts

At first God wanted just himself.
And this huge output of light whirled in horror
Throughout the heavens with nothing very much to do.
Knowing evil and good he was bored.
Knowing life he was really fed up,
So he set up like an artist to fulfill his needs,
And wandered from the first day and entered the second.

This was the layering of the mists.
And God not seeing what was under his foot
Called this the second day.

The third day God saw what was emerging beneath him.
The green mist and undulation of land and water:
Its modulated rhythm and irritability of split forms
Spitting up from the earth's face massed fronds
And circular prisms of light.
These he watched, startled, until there evolved
The springing active branches of varied leaves,
Plants, shrubs, and trees. A dishevelled array;
A residue of years impelling change of growth.
The reptiles unknown to him but already in birth
Peered at his own curiosity and at their own under a
Blanching light. The mammals also secure on
The tree of life and hidden by its enormous branches of
Passing mystery, clutched the young to their breasts.

On the fourth day the stars appeared in stern formation
But were obscured by the sun's warrior rays.
The evening of the fourth day found them poked.
They shone with anger rather than with grace

And fulfilled no heavenly place.
 The moon yielded a false light, and all things
 Living swayed with uneasiness and took
 Note of each other . interchanging and companionable . .
 The secret of life stirred in their blood.
 And this the serpent termed fear. And he was right,
 For God disappeared that night into the mist.

By the fifth day God returned in travail and
 Travelled with rage over his whole continent
 His potent wrath aroused birds of splendid hue and pattern
 Whirls of magical and myriad moths, flocks of all
 Shocked shapes and colour, all whirling, half-flying
 Rumbling above the earth rising surprised at the sight of
 His terror. And having risen once they subsided in mist.
 Now let man arise.
 And he came with his green shell of a body with tender
 Hue out of the greening mist.
 The light of God warmed and floodlit his powerless frame
 And dissolved his paralytic fear and mission of no sense.
 He came forward stretching for guidance.
 God weakened by certain loss of his creative flame
 Isolated this creature. . .
 Who soon became truculent with too much light.

Eve arose indignant at his side. She was not created
 Life compelled her forward. She held no scruples
 And immediately sought the forbidden tree.
 For this written evidence and graft of truth
 We can be truly grateful.
 Now at the end of this sixth day, God having
 Set his bait, fell away among the immortal palms
 To quibble with his conscience. The garden was too large to
 Till, and he had not given them their freedom.
 The cows Eve said were the only bit of sense.

So God mused on the seventh day and lazed among the hills,
 And Eve spying him out asleep against the hedge
 Shouted, and knew herself to be a shrew.
 This, she said, and meant it for thousands of years after,
 "Boss, this is a man's game it is the religion of man
 Just who created woman and where do we come in. . .
 The seventh day is lousy it is our worst ever."

Struggling in the bower of fragrant blisses
 Makes of sorrow his erotic song
 That hangs the writhing wreath upon the tomb.

The reddest flower shall bear the greenest snake
 From out its velvet core shall lift its head,
 Stamen-lips and pistil-tongues of flame,
 Hissing fugues, sonatas of the dead
 Musicians who from their granite graves awake
 To fulfill desire, the undreamed dream,
 On lambent walls of night inscribe their names.

The warrior with his shield dripping blood
 Held in his hand the head of the murdered boy
 Whose sleeping eyes and mouth were innocence
 Of pigeons and Blake's bleating lambs of joy.
 Magnificent in light the warrior stood
 Haloed with growing leaves of eloquence
 Which spoke his fame and told his eminence.

But oh, the strict concertos of the skull,
 The flutes and oboes of the chambered brain,
 The watch-work mind, the delicate coils unwinding
 The unicorn upon his blue terrain
 Of high Himalaya where the beautiful
 Black wrist of hair shall hold us, binding
 Tongue to tongue and the red flesh blinding.

His the statued clouds with fishes heads,
 The gryphon with the eyes of amethyst, ,
 Singer of death and immortality
 Who beds the monster's wrath in honeyed deeds
 And blesses basilisk his ashen tryst,
 While hermaphroditic worms crawl up the sky
 Whispering visions of those about to die.

And icebergs of his breath consume in fire
 The sparrow and his crumb of bitterness.
 The snow-king flees his glacial home
 Before the splendor of the borealis,
 And rioting in frost his blazing hair
 Falls now across the ladders of the bone
 That we climb up to share his crystal throne.

FOUR POEMS

Marcia Nardi

CITY SUNDAY

It couldn't be Monday:
Mr. Cobbler who,
With coal and kerosene set by
For winter and the payments made
In full now on his lathe was thus declared
In school-books happy slave-owner,
Sits in his back-yard garden
And watches his Dahlias grow
As eagerly as Faraday
Made the electric current flow.

Summer and Sunday:
Behind the tenement walls
His flowers have for mountain view,
The radios slumber and the brawls,
And terrified in sleep the drowsy city dreams
That through its fleshless veins the earthworms crawl
From Mr. Cobbler's little patch of ground.

But we it is . . .
The city's own, the city's chained
The city's fed and leashed and muzzled pets
Who creep
Along the sprawled out giant's
Iron arteries until
When finally we reach her melting finger-tips
In Coney-Island's breakers bathed

And in Van Cortland's pools and creeks
The long hard road that boasting science took
Long centuries to travel,
Behind us like a phantom lies
In one rich hour covered backwards by
The poor's erasing feet.

PASTORAL SCENE

Astray I walked into the calendar picture
Of the grazing cow and calf and the sheep
And anyone could have left me then—
Lover or friend—and I would not have missed him,
One of the figures stretched there on the lawn
Having turned so easily into me.

Oh what did I walk out of? A siesta? A play?
My life it was, my time, the scenery of my day to day
As Breughel might have painted them, or Sisley
Or even Giotto . . . being less far away
Than the calendar picture I walked into
From the scenery of my within
And the landscape of my outward way.

And I saw and loved again
The Noah's Ark beasts of my childhood,
So identically these . . . this cow, this sheep,
And as far removed from the real—coached and guided,
As the literal meanings of words from speech.

My back was to the automobiles
But I felt them carry off
The canvases for centuries hung
Over the cow of my ark
And an apple tree that resisted
Obeisance to Ingres as well as Bracque,
And imprisoned there in the calendar picture I found
Odysseus with the fetters lost
And greenness the sound.

NO EMILY'S AND NO BLAKE'S

Return
If only in a candle-lighted half-dark glass
The smoothness of her throat and brow,
Restore
If only in forest pool at sundown
That look of youth male bark yields birdlime for.

And how the magic hat invisibly
With rabbits filled
That charmed her in her childhood will suddenly be
Some tattered schoolroom map of six by four
From which some Thurston marvelously draws
Real Aetnas
And all her prisons whether poverty
Or loneliness again will have their doors
Past Vega, one, and one
Past Sirius
Which with the dwindling of her falconers are shrunk
To arm's reach though more tightlocked than before.

No Emily's mind is this,
No Blake's. But ah bring back,
Oh mists that floating Parises
Find generous and clouds that pour
On asphalt husks of wanderlust
A river's skin and heart,
To these more singular than Phoenix wings
Their go'den cage with the jewelled bars
And see them soar.

BEING LEFT WITHOUT A POEM

I was left without a poem,
Thought,
Idea,

It grew so still
I could almost hear

The drops of brandy pass,
Across the crowded, laughing
Beer-drunk bar,
Into the one small glass.

The Nazis killed at Stalingrad
That time
Were twenty-seven thousand
According to the newsboy's
Black headlines;

The exigencies of my blood
Were strong that time,
According to my throat's
And forehead's
Three new lines.

But the dim-out of my era
And my life
Became a phantom white
Because I could not write

And I heard God's silent voice
Amid the chantings
Of Hosea
Being left
Without a poem,
Thought,
Idea.

OBJECTS HAVE A HISTORY

Albert Cook

*The future is stationary, dear Herr Kappus,
but we are moving in infinite space.*

—Rilke

I

A crusty air encases that wrist watch
The major chose while touring Oswiecim
From shoeboxes full, stripped off of prisoners
Whom trusties herded shuddering and nude
To ovens ash-caked with trainloads of their kind.
He blackens in the shadows of those fires.

Your monthly check presents you with a proof
Of your involvement. If you renounce all checks,
Tatters identify you as a failure;
Even when shed or thrown on the city dump
They share your past and ill protect from sleet
Or shame, the tramp who stumbles down rusting rails.

What you pass on to heirs must tinge their lives:
Answering your gift in hate or love
Entangles them with you. The dying strive
To put will's shot light years beyond the mark
Of death, but it death-leaded thuds to earth.
Art is a legacy, and all careers.

II

Beer bottles, rainstained papers, such debris
 Betray the broker's praise of his resort.
 Not soil but gardeners obliterate
 His party's traces Once indifferent pines
 Hold Chinese lanterns, they are not the same
 Though later explorers find no souvenirs.

No forest is virgin. Any hunter's eye
 Ravishes landscape in the act of sight.
 Algonquins no longer paddle the northern stream
 Your Indian guide shuns by an act of choice.
 If you make him push your portage on that far,
 The thrill you feel in to follow in their tracks.

On the imagined house alone does paint
 Not crack and blister under authentic heat.
 Your house's age is what you appropriate
 From a tradition. Repairs are camouflage.
 In annual suns all cities must decay,
 And revival indicates a nearing death.

III

Heraclius the Byzantine Emperor
 Took oath on a bejewelled fragment of the true cross.
 Now Hagia Sophia is a mosque
 And our museums vie to reproduce
 Her gold mosaics; St. John Chrysostom
 Outshines Eudoxia by being canonized.

The judge's robes intimidate the thief
 Who looks up toward the bench to hear his fate.
 Spotlights and machine guns do the work of gyves,
 And dungeons are archaic. In his cell
 The convict learns how objects change with time
 By being handled as a social case.

When idolators steal a full ciborium,
 The sacristan must mourn; God bleeds again.
 We shudder before the altar of green stone
 Where with volcanic glass the Aztec priest
 Rent victims' hearts and held them aloft to heaven,
 For there hell's properties assault our souls.

IV

Who handles, fondles. Sentiments accrete
To all we own. In an abounding world
Things serve our wills or kindle at our gaze.
We take to planes, books, or securities
And adding to their past define our lives.
Its trash and treasures characterize an age.

Animals are also objects: your dreaming dog,
The horse that Rilke saw on Russia's plain,
Migrating birds and lions in the night.
The trainer to his charges is attached
And they respond. It troubles any child
To watch the coiling panther pace his cage.

We move among our former lives' remains.
In the suburban spring fires of dead grass
As well as weeds possess the vacant lot,
And paths that cross it trace our last descent
From homes we furnished piece by cherished piece.
Toward spacious avenues no children roam.

EIGHT POEMS

William Jay Smith

THE IDIOT BENEATH THE EL

From summer's tree the leopard leaves are torn
Like faces from the windows of the train,
And at my foot a mad boy's tweed cap falls,
And no moth's born that can disturb his brain.

The traffic, with a sound of cap and bells,
Winds into his ear; his open eyes
Are button-hooks, his tight lips pink sea-shells,
His fingers reach as far as the heron flies.

Below, the leaves lie still in the wind and rain,
And overhead the rails run on and meet
Somewhere outside of time; the clamor dies;
An iron hoop goes clanking down the street.

THE PIAZZA

When all the world was out-of-doors
By those Etruscan sycamores
The cool and constant fountains played
Against a line of sombre towers
And turned the moments into flowers,
And bore the sun into the shade.

Militant above the crowds
 Assembling there the fleecy clouds
 Like soldiers capped in full parade
 Had broken ranks and overrun
 The dying yet immortal sun
 In robes of glory still arrayed.

The cypresses along the hill
 With feathered crest and crimson quill
 Kept their cryptic copy-book;
 And while from out the pages came
 Sentences inscribed in flame,
 The naked earth in silence shook.

The afternoon was like a bell
 Of glass from which the hours fell
 And broke in pieces as they passed:
 The sun is borne into the shade;
 Moments, flowers, fountains fade,
 And all of light in darkness lost.

PERSIAN MINIATURE

Ah, all the sands of the earth lead unto heaven.
 I have seen them rise on the wind, a golden thread.
 The sands of the earth which enter the eye of heaven,
 Over the graves, the poor, white bones of the dead.
 Over the buckling ice, the swollen rivers,
 Over the ravened plains, and the dry creek-beds,
 The sands are moving. I have seen them move,
 And where the pines are bent, the orient
 Grain awaits the passage of the wind.
 Higher still the laden camels thread
 Their way beyond the mountains, and the clouds
 Are whiter than the ivory they bear
 For Death's black eunuchs. Gold, silk, furs
 Cut the blood-red morning. All is vain.
 I have watched the caravans through the needle's eye,
 As they turn, on the threshing floor, the bones of the dead,
 And green as a grasshopper's leg is the evening sky.

NUKUHIVA*

For Stephen Spender

I

It was in time of war, and yet no war,
No sound of war, and scarce the memory of one
So terrible that none forget troubled
Our passage, the ship's dark keel breaking
The phosphorescent water, foam riding the halyards.
Far, far, far from home, the sailor busy with the day's routine,
We came one morning where the mountains rose
Upon a semi-circular and emerald bay,
And a few birds circled like a flaw,
To the beautiful island of Nukuhiva.

Here Melville came, pursuing and pursued,
An angry spirit in a lasting rage,
Came tracked by time and all its skeletal
Transactions, the decay of empires, tracked
By life and death, and worlds of lies,
To Nukuhiva, and the whaleback bay,
An animal that listens with its eyes.

Seaweed trailed from scupper-hole, and folded sail.
The whaler rode the water, and the sailor's gaze
Went out to greet the islanders, the great
Canoes tilting with stalwart oarsmen, and the girls
As gold as morning diving from the surf,
The scent of oil and flowers.

II

The ship's boat swung
From the davits, then the wildcat purr of motors broke
The circling silence, and the jumbled rocks ashore
Came nearer, steady, up, the whip and lash of waves.

This was a place that memory corrupts,
A tumbling house half-seen through green and mottled

*Nukuhiva, the scene of Melville's *Typee*, is one of the Marquesas Islands. The islanders whom Melville describes are now almost extinct.

Foliage. The Frenchman talked of Paris and of youth,
Of Suez and Arabia and the East;
While the furious sunlight beat upon the rocks,
And words crept out like lizards on the leaves,
Bird-song, wind-song, sun.

The horses waited cropping the dry brown grass
By the open gate, the crumbling wall; we swung
Into the saddle, sunlight flecking the hooves.

What was the island then? And who will say,
The wind, the sun, the moon? So much is buried there
In what was scarce a century ago
The center of a commerce and a colony,
Amalgam of Soho and a Yukon town,
Where drunken planter strode, and trader dipped,
And the bishop like a fat persimmon sat
Under the green palmetto in the afternoon.

III

Up, up, up we rode through trees and tangled vines,
Struggling as one struggles in a dream
Across a moving mass of melting snow,
Words fail, the trail is lost among the trees.
Up the temple steps, the chipped, black stone
Breaking the clumsy branches, horses' froth
Smelling of papaia and mango.

Winding and unwinding like a leash,
We came to the burial platforms, the plateau,
And heard the water crashing through the vines,
And heard behind us, upward from the bay:
Revenez, revenez! On avait des copains!
Always in a language that was never mine.

Nukuhiva, Hivaoa, Raiatea,
The islands and the names are poetry,
But they are spoken by the voices of the drowning,
By the voices of the men who are remembered
By the cold, white, lonely fingers of the sea.

IV

Whatever we had come for lay behind,
 And what we sought lay still ahead.
 As we approached the beach, the west was red;
 The pompoms of the sailors danced upon the waves
 Like poppies on the distant fields of Brittany
 Across the semi-circular and horseshoe bay,
 And all the wailing places of the dead.

EVENING AT GRANDPONT

Who under a stone bridge in the dark
 Has seen?—We saw there, remember, wait,
 The wind falls, wait, the street
 Is empty now the leaves, the leaves
 Are flocking to your feet—

Two swans, their floating, fluted necks
 Down under feathers' whiteness,
 Snow-plumed birds, awake?—no
 Not awake, two birds there deep
 Down under thunder rocking,
 Cradled, swans asleep.

Tell me, will you?—well I know
 How deep the swirling waters go
 Beneath those two white throats,
 The floor that whirls with dancer's step,
 And death's dark notes,
 Now tell me—

Who

Under a stone bridge in the
 Darkness?—wait, the wind, the columned air,
 The leaves are falling, and they gather there
 Like China's universities before the gate.

ORPHEUS

Orpheus with music charms the birds
And animals, the fish, the falling waves,
The stars that might be starfish overhead,
And dragons in their oriental caves.
By men who suffer he is always heard,
And speaks of life, and death which darkness brings,
Of roads that wind like sorrow through the trees,
Of forest, and of hills like sleeping kings.

Let us prepare; the god of music comes.
He will have laurel, and a fountain playing,
Moon-men ready at the kettle-drums,
Fire-tipped lances, moon-white horses neighing,
Earth awakening from her tragic sleep,
The cool, ecstatic earth. O hear, O hear.

LACHRYMAE CHRISTI

Let the redbird come to feast:
The cherry-pickers long have ceased,
And I can see their ladders there
All aslant the summer air,
Heavy on the shining trees.
They bear away the jewel-box
With steps like fingers winding clocks
That have not ticked for centuries.
Time is dead: there is no time;
No one now can ever climb
The ladder back to that black bough.
One man did, and he is dead,
And all the woods around are red,
And through the trees the redbirds fly,
While the rain falls from the cold sky.

THE PARK IN MILAN

The animals we have seen, all marvelous creatures,
The lion king, the pigmy antelope,
The zebra like a convict cutting corners,
Birds in cages, orioles and doves,
The sacred ibis with a beak like a gravy dish,
Tropical fish weaving a Persian carpet
For the dancing feet of sunlight, marvelous creatures,
Theirs is the kingdom of love.

Love we have brought them
On a summer day, weary from walking:
Like children who cool their faces on piano keys,
We turn to the quiet park, the good, green trees,
And a wealth of animal being runs in our minds like music.

Like music all the miracles of being,
The flash and fire of sunlight and of sound,
The elephant in cage of muted thunder,
Zebras on the shaken, shaded ground.

Turning from them now like children turning,
We watch the city open like a wound,
With gutted church and bombed and broken buildings,
Girders like black bones that lace the void,
All we build through love through hate destroyed,
The world an aged animal that heaves and cries
Under the trees, the gay, green trees of summer.

Music fades; the streets are black with flies.

CHRISTMAS EVE

Brenda Chamberlain

I lying in the dark awake
With night on my breast
Heard mountain neighbors in the snowy fields
Running among the sheep
With tambour and drum: crying
Find us the Ram, the sacred flockfather
And where is the youngest Lamb?

Having no reason for festival
I angrily tossed off the blankets:
Put on warm clothes and went out
To see what madness held the shepherds.

A hand touched my shoulder.
It was Gwenellian of the White Field
Who laughed when I asked her:
Tell me, woman of the clover
What has come over our neighbours?

She said a Boy
Had come down the roof of the world
To be ransom and saviour
Of every creature,
Which filled me with birdsong:
Red wine and new bread:
As I ran to the place
Like a partridge for swiftness,
Pushing darkness from my head.

The unshorn Ram Fertility
Is harnessed with scarlet ribbons
And led between the shafts
Of a cart that shepherds have covered
With candles and branches of ilex
And garterings of coloured paper.

Priest and acolite and congregation
This midnight brings your blond youth
Down the rampart of the mountain
Where the icefall's tongue is smooth.
Angels with praising wings
Join voices with pipe and tabor.
Two minstrels lead us away
Much farther than Idwal's shore
And farther than Clogwyn Dur Arddu
Where the red fox is king.

Shepherds: leave the frozen fields.
No harm shall visit the flocks
That lie between the rocks.
Come and worship this evergreen bough
Come and worship this blade of wheat
Come and worship this Virgin's Child
With the face of a god yet whose feet
Are mortal in the trampled snow.

Your angels are village children
Wearing tinsel stars in their bright hair
And cut-down bridal dresses on unformed limbs.
Do not fool me with bell and incense
And the promise of mysteries.
Though I may be a starve-acre farmer
Mine is the oldest family in the parish
And fifty years ago my grandfather
Was put into a song by a local poet.

Because, despite yourself, you wish,
Because your heart desires more
Than is in the material world,
Because the heart craves a miracle,
Go, wary and indifferent shepherd
To find the Sunboy shaken in a golden drum,

Who will tell you, the Godhead
 Has befriended
 Your manhood.
 Enter the rock
 Enter the ice
 For fear of this Child
 Who shall make the earth tremble.
 Go into the holes of the rock
 Into the caves, the jagged clefts
 Before the larch trees fall in the squire's coverts
 And dwarf oaks lie across the narrow roads,
 Before the mountains fall into the laps of the lessern hills
 And they and their burden go into the sea.
 The Child's hand shall be on the tower
 In which you keep your enemy,
 On every barbed fence, wall and dyke,
 For He is the earth shaker
 And has established Himself
 In the silent snows.
 Go then and pay Him homage.

Where is the whistle pipe I carved last winter?
 Where is the shirt of white linen
 And the blue serge cloak woven by my mother?
 A sweet tune on the pipe
 A flask of wine and a bottle of milk
 Will shorten the miles.
 My grandfather used to consult the sky.
 He said the full moon
 Always brought clear weather
 And when the wind ruffled the stars
 It would be very cold.

We have taken the Lamb to the altar
 In the old chapel
 For if we do not believe
 We are lost. Now more than ever
 We shall be lost, if we do not believe.

So let us, as we go home
 In the young morning, cry
 From the ramparts of Garnedd Llewelyn
 Over the valleys and the sea

BRENDA CHAMBERLAIN

And beyond, to the island of Mon
Much farther than Caer Gybi
Let us praise from the snows
The radiant Sunboy.

THREE POEMS

Howard Sergeant

THE LEAVES OF EUROPE

Autumn again, the leopardlike and burning
season, but with it no discovery in sky
or feather, no flicker in the lantern eyes
of berries. The word we learnt has lost its meaning.

Today the sun is impotent, either to salve
our consciousness with the touch of hands or strike
for us a fountain from the voiceless rock;
our only light an evanescence clipped
through the folds of cloud by the wild geese flying
homewards to the saltings, to the uninhibited land.
The stone lies heavy on the heart and is not now
to be moved by time or the snow-bright angel's shoulder.

Autumn again and I have seen the cold
grey fingers of death at work among the trees,
a traffic in limbs and faces, star following
fading star to the beaten grass like infants
racing out of school—but these are children
without joy or gesture, without the anarchy
of childhood:

 their lips will be remembered by
the hungry breasts of Europe when the soft
wind-voices speak, and small ghosts lift their faces
in the darkness for kisses that cannot be given.
The twigs that wear the horseshoe scars for grief
will never know their soft green flesh again.

Autumn again, and I have seen the labourers
gather on a frosty morning at the wood's bare fringes
where the furrows, rich with a memory of summer,
the bearded corn, lie easy as a woman after
travail and stretch their fingertips under
the briars, under the rough warm blankets of soil.
I have seen them burning leaves, the smoke curling
above the meadows, a flock of bewildered lambs
bursting upon the hedges and the pastures of wind.

*A shepherd would know these lambs—their ears are notched
with a cross—would know the pitchmarks on their backs*

Sparks aim for the heart on the crimped air
but the leafburners have instructions, hirelings
accustomed to obey. The old men, slow-moving
and cautious, keep always to windward and lean
upon their long broomhandles when the tongues
of flame stammer into speech over the branches,
absorbing the language into their cold bones.

Now more than leaves are heaped on the smouldering fires.
Somewhere in the distance the lost music rises,
the autumn songs of children, for whom the wind
is a voice in the trees and the berries douse their light.

This is the chosen darkness,
this is the myth our fathers
and their fathers knew, and choosing
closed their eyes and ears, and gave
their willing hands to any cause
that named them heroes, that promised
no responsibility—
to plead
I am absolved; I was commanded

And this is false
to murmur
I was not there

THE TOWER IN THE WIND

The wind, not history, blows over them...

From the woods, from hollows
 of the whalebacked moors,
 lovers crept in sleep
 to the thigh-built towers,
 to the pillows of the bride—
 blown flame, where the time
 was flesh, and the flesh
 was world without land
 in the endless foam
 of the taking and giving,
 and the end was always
 the Word making love
 in the tide and the ache
 of the oyster, time:

—and heard not the wind nor the waters rising—

In the time of the oyster,
 in the break of the tide,
 the love making Word
 is the way to one end
 where the giving is taking,
 and the taking believing
 foam to be infinite
 land without world,
 curled in the magic
 of flesh. But their sleep
 is a crypt, and the towering
 flame but a breath
 of the leaf-riding death
 from the woods and the moors.

LAMENT FOR A WISE HEAD

You're mixing your drinks, said liver to lover,
and wine of the heart is bane to the head.
Follow your impulse, said river to rover,
but exploit all the wealth of your watershed.
Exploit all the wealth—advised the wise head.

Your faith is my fortune, said drummer to dreamer,
the skin of the saint makes a firm drumhead.
Though you revel in darkness, said scholar to schemer,
the light of the mind will unravel your thread.
The mind will unravel—murmured the wise head.

What's next on the menu? said diner to donor,
—the poor will ensure you the heavenly bread.
You name my transgressions, said sinner to stoner,
but know you the monster that moves in *your* bed?
Know you the monster—pursued the wise head.

The Lord is my surety, said pauper to piper,
for the signature-tune of the quick and the dead.
You cannot escape me, said leper to leaper,
though you caper with stars the devil's in tread.
The devil's in tread—affirmed the wise head.

He's much too importunate, said helmsman to headman,
for the health of society—*off with the wise head!*

TWO POEMS

Sherry Mangan

VINCENT SULLIVAN

Gentleman, scholar, and romantic (at least within reason), Vincent steered his comet to become at thirty the wittiest assistant professor in a university renowned for mots (they kept score on their bottom evening shirt's cardboard stiffeners). He was a good husband, a better father, an unbeatable host; and his pride was never in his life to have fallen an inch for propaganda. About socialism he was thus urbanely sardonic: "Credat Iudæus Apella."

When last seen, he was studying the language of the Japanese under forced draught, "to help where he could." And he abounded in ingenious theories about that nation's incurable degeneracy. If by pressing a button, he could kill, he said, two million Japanese, just show him the button: "The only good Japanese is a dead Japanese."

He must have loved Hiroshima, the poor sucker.

Etudes for the Eleventh Finger:

Grade 5: SEVEN DIVES: *a Sensible Dead End*

Take seven dives, then, Father Sergeant. Thank you. Arm your
 grael
 with crooks before and after; traverse grim grammar's dale;
 now butter Pa with torque and fistula, him gently leaven,
 so Kris may sing to bairns, and you hang seven times seven.

At home, to gobble Slavs, at standing Delia make signs of
 old wreckers' lights, a Satan's swarm—this vets man like a glove;
 in lairs of docking whistles, elders will at billing veer,
 so try for sons, blue sisters' fodder; fans will nap it queer.

But seven dives vexed the upper valley, axles breaded stark
 old sleet on Pa, aching in thrall, and brought out scar and mark;
 wherefrom a gladsome village rose, much longer to eat clocks
 or candy, fair with glory old, and girt with building blocks.

In Hermes' name, thou oldest sound, when shall I sing it free?
 Go talk thy gabble, eating go, or do embroidery.
 Go get the visa, elder sot, break through the crooked wood,
 and seven dives take till Slavs are tanked, and you shall have
 withstood.

Thus Milan's jags make sons our debts, to scatter granny's swing;
 Father was son, though garpike wish; the trap is set to spring.
 Who pleases all displeases all, who drifts finds normal death;
 and only you can know yourself—the rest is waste of breath.

THE TRANSMIGRANT

Harold Grier McCurdy

Between waking and sleeping, in that land
Neither ours nor theirs, where the keyhole
Lets in a dusty streamer of light, illuminating
A hoof or a fin or the half-face of a stranger,
Between rational and irrational, I saw
Clerkly Pythagoras, who, stunned by the surge of numbers
Rolling their dice along the sonorous shore,
Meditated upon the permutations of his body,
That sieve and whirlwind like a twanging cord
Musical between the sharp horns of a triangle.
The bossed shield of Euphorbus clanged in his thought
Against the gold breastpin of Helen, and towers
Fell with a crash of china cups and saucers, or flared
Suddenly up and out like a newspaper
In the swift draft of a furnace. And he was there
Caught in the crisscross of bony fingers of light,
Among the guttering candles and glories of time,
Cobwebs and rotten rafters and old iron,
Eternally growing, like a cellar plant,
Pale, thin, and limber, and too full of juice;
Eternally growing, whether he would or no,
Among the scrap iron and scrap lumber of history,
Weak as a hydrocephalic touched by the sun's last rays,
Pale plant in a cracked pot. "My life is weary," he said,
"And neither the iceman cometh, nor the hot savior
Making a crossmark beautiful on the night sky,
Flying and singing like a fiery swan.
I am St. Ixion on the turning wheel,
Tantalus between the cup and the grape,
Neither Christian nor Dionysian. Limbo is my home.

My ears are stuffed with the unbaptized crying
Of babes born out of wedlock. I cannot hear
Any new thing, nor experience a revelation
Through the cataracts of my eyes. My one talent
Corrodes in its burial hole, peevish with age,
Thin tentative creeper of the chlorotic soul,
Anaemic and amnesic; and the cord twangs
Irrational on the horns of the moon, the hypothermose
I cannot measure, cannot gamble away."
The dicing numbers sobbed and sobbed on the shore,
And, mixed with that sobbing like a crooked smoke,
The emanations of his powerful mind
Rose fatly on my dream, and scented the cave
(Where in the dark the Platonic sleepers lie)
With an odor like violets, or
The burnt letters of a lost love.

FIVE POEMS

May Swenson

LOVE IS

a rain of diamonds
in the mind

the soul's fruit
sliced in two

a dark spring
loosed at the lips of light

under-earth waters
unlocked from their lurking
to sparkle in a crevice
parted by the sun

a temple
not of stone but cloud
beyond the heart's roar
and all violence

outside the anvil-stunned domain
unfrenzied space

between the grains of change
blue permanence

one short step
to the good ground

the bite into bread again

SUN

with your masculine stride
you tread insidious clouds and glide
to the unobstructed parapet of noon-blue

ruthless rip through cumulous veils of sloth
spurn their sly caresses and erect
an immediate stairway to passion's splendid throne

From yourself you fling your own earth-seed
and orbits organize in the wombless infinite
for your disciplined planets

Like radiant boys they imitate
your stamping feet in the elliptic dance of fire

You are not moon-dependent on desire
in rotund rhythm leashed to a mineral despot
like that satellite in female furrow sown

She a white rib plucked from Adam-earth
but appended still
eclipsed beneath his dark chest
writhing to his will

one-sided shield turned to the urgent tide
compelled to yield to the night-sky slime
marble-smiling sinks in moss

at dawn rubbed thin
a mutilate she melts and faints
in the cold cloud curd

While you are up afork the first ringing word
of potent joy the sharp-tined golden shout
divine and glistering your beard with dewy flames
sprinting to the pantheon and your godlike games

CAFE TABLEAU

Hand of the copper boy
pours tea deft wrist square fist
salmon-satin-lined

Dark-muscled dancers among porcelain
twined his fingers and long thumb

He stands dumb in crisp white coat
but his blood in heavy neck-vein
eloquent its flood plunges
to each purple nail emanates
male electrons

His pupils conscienceless as midnight skies
between the moon-whites of his eyes avoid
tea-sipper's naked shoulder
diamond-cold her throat

That she is female his broad nostrils
have denied like figs dried when green
her breasts now shrivel in the refusal
of his stare

His thigh athletic slender retreats
behind her chair in his hips
nothing tender ancestral savagery
has left him lion-clean

Furtive beneath mental hedges she sees
feels his bare wrist square fist her
boneless hand creeps up the crisp sleeve
higher she squeals and finds the nipples
of his hairless chest

The copper boy's white coat
become a loincloth she unwinds he wades
into the pool of her stagnant desire

THE KEY TO EVERYTHING

Is there anything I can do
or has everything been done
or do
you prefer somebody else to do
it or don't
you trust me to do
it right or is it hopeless and no one can do
a thing or do
you suppose I don't
really want to do
it and am just saying that or don't
you hear me at all or what

You're
waiting for
the right person the doctor or
the nurse the father or
the mother or
the person with the name you keep
mumbling in your sleep
that no one ever heard of there's no one
named that really
except yourself maybe

If I knew what your name was I'd
prove it's your
own name spelled backwards or
twisted in some way the one you
keep mumbling but you
won't tell me your
name or
don't you know it
yourself that's it
of course you've
forgotten or
never quite knew it or
weren't willing to believe it

Then there is something I
can do I

can find your
name for you
that's the key to everything once you'd
repeat it clearly you'd
come awake you'd
get up and walk knowing where you're
going where you
came from

And you'd
love me
after that or would you
hate me
no once you'd
get there you'd
remember and love me
of course I'd
be gone by then I'd
be far away

HAND BETTER THAN A WING?

feel like A Bird
understand
he has no hand

instead A Wing
close-lapped
mysterious thing

in sleeveless coat
he halves The Air
skipping there
smooth as
water-licked boat

lands on star-toes
finger-beak in
feather-pocket
finds no coin

in neat head
like seeds
in a Quartered Apple
eyes join
sniping at opposites
stereoscope The Scene
before

close to floor giddy
no arms to fling
A Third Sail
spreads for calm
his tail

hand better
than A Wing?
to gather A Heap
to count
to clasp A Mate

or leap
lone-free and mount
on muffled shoulders
to span A Fate?

.

SIX POEMS

Alain Bosquet

POEM OF FLIGHT

Is there yet a world where I can seek shelter
And need not be forgiven for still being alive,
A world more humane than the one I now flee?
Anger there pervades the gentlest gestures
And villages are torn away from the dale
Like the two wings from a captive fly.
Blood is cheaper there, this year,
Than wine. Full-blown heads are gathered
From all the trees in the gardens. But if,
Glad to forget a while my burden of cruelty,
I sigh, this sigh too is like the cry
Of a wild goose that with one stroke of its beak
Murders the sky. Is there yet a world
Where I can sit quietly beside myself
And share my fear with my young exile
And my blind sorrow? But no, I belong
To the land of hate where men shoot
The dawn, and children trample the dew.
To this land must I return: there a man will laugh
At his own life and, with great dignity,
Will do his best to become his own mortal enemy.

A WORLD'S CEMETERY

Here lies life, here lies laughter,
Here lies the child that was guilty
Of taming a handful of snow.
Here lies space and here lies man:

They refused to love each other.
 "Forgive me," says the tall tree;
 And the tree has hanged itself
 From the loftiest of its branches.
 "I am sorry," says the comet:
 And the comet seats itself
 By the tomb of the birds.
 Where is he who persisted
 In trying to understand everything?
 Where is he who forever asked
 Why one weeps or speaks to the wind?
 Here lies what? The night hastens
 To meet the night. Here lies. . . .
 Who then understands mourning and is moved
 To tears when he sees
 Men fall, things vanish?

THE DOOMED

There they all sit in a circle
 Insulting their life.
 One caresses the dusk:
 Daylight is not his trade.
 Another pursues his chair;
 Things have long been avoiding him.
 Some would like to speak
 But have never known
 The simplest words.
 One even tries
 To open his missing eye.
 All of them, in chorus, curse
 Their threadbare planet
 Because the flood
 That they secretly expect
 Has not yet come.

INNER STRIFE

My left hand is my hangman,
 My right hand is my rescuer,
 My eyes banish me,
 My voice coaxes me:

My disappointed friends
Who must be reconciled at last
At my expense
And invent a world
Where there's no room for me.

BALANCE-SHEET

A man tested himself:
Hatred and wind.
A man wanted to live:
An odd calling.
A man was happy
But in the heart of his heart
A stone was sad.
A man dared pretend
That he was a joke:
To him alone
The world granted
An hour of respite,
Enough time to plan
A new deluge.

THE PETRIFIED MAN

He sits at the cross-roads of his exile
And stares at his hands that have just lost
Their lines of survival. He would like to stroke
His memory; its fur is softer than fire,
But none dares tell him that it has died
Of having once rubbed itself against his soul's
Other side. Staying there like an obelisk
Raised by fear, does he know that his eye-lid
Flies off each time that a bird summons it,
And that in his splitting skull the centipede
And the nettle fight to the death for a drop of dew?

Translated by Edouard Roditi

*PASSACAGLIA FOR FOGHORN,
BRAND-NEW RADIO-PHONOGRAPH
(INSTALLMENT DUE) AND ONE
HUMAN VOICE (TACIT)*

Irwin Kroening

To Mary

THAT MARCH SUNDAY morning Gershom quit the factory at the usual time of seven o'clock, boarded a Wells Street car, bought a dollar pass for the week and rode over to the east side of town. When he stepped off the streetcar at Brady he had already forgotten his hypnotic sleep against the cold gray windowpane, where harsh and ominous revelations of the city fulgurated behind deepsunken lids. Now he felt less tired, so instead of going up to the room right away he decided to walk out along the breakwater. He crossed Prospect Avenue, entered the empty lot flanked by an apartment house on one side and a dirty stucco private home on the other, descended the bluff to Lincoln Memorial Drive and crossed the Coast Guard Station grounds to Lake Michigan.

When he reached the breakwater the sun was rising out of the Lake and fog ahead of him. It was a strident redgold, diffuse upon air, and the reflection across water pointed to his heart like a sword of flame. He began walking the breakwater slowly. The side towards the open Lake was incrustated with dull inarticulate shapes of ice, locked in agony, which the waves had covered with pink sand pockmarked like an ugly face. The fog was luminous with many lights, and out of it came the deep green swells of water tipped with rose. About a quarter of a mile from shore he came upon a flock of wild duck riding the swells. The lonely sound of his leather heels on concrete made them take flight before him, beating wings to trail their legs along water with a soft splashing sound and a white evanescent wake, then rising urgently into air.

Gershom walked for some time. At last he stopped and looked back on the city. Far across water he could see the North Avenue pumping tower hang unsubstantial as smoke on the fog, there where the dawn touched its sharp rococo spire a sheen pearlgray. Suspended at skyline the hotels and apartment houses along the bluff were taking a transcendental clarity. Each looked as if it had been carved from pink stone. In their faraway windows the rising sun became fractured many times. Behind each golden mote of light lay fierce promise of richly appointed rooms and of godlike people who dwelt in them, removed from ugliness and death to walk nobly through the terrible legends of the poor, through the jeweled moments of his ecstasies.

He turned and made his way further out onto the Lake. Every step allowed the water to lose identity in the fog behind him and gain identity from the fog before him. The swimming ducks and large drifting blocks of ice belonged only to a small inhuman circle, dispassionate and unutterable in the glossary of time. Now another duck beat its way to the air before him, making cries like a fast turning wheel squeaking on its axle. There were gulls in the water too and several above his head, their wings spread out strong and lazy to the morning wind. One came so close that he could observe the stupid expression about its beak and little eyes. Its cry was pitched slightly lower than that of the duck, a squeak which sounded as if it came through a small horn. The morning was raw but not too cold. For a while as he walked he breathed through the damp lakesmell a startling fragrance: like that of honey. Gershom could not tell its direction or what was causing it, yet he lifted his head and a quiet exaltation came to him. Across the water from the veiled city fell the iron stroke of a single churchbell. The sound was at once faraway and clear, sabbatical and dislocated. It resonated softly within him to stir slumbering obligations of a childhood and pleasantly quicken awareness of his isolation. He stopped walking and stood silent before the east, where water secretly lipped the icelocked forms. Beyond lay the glowing vaporous path to the sun, redgold to gold to green and rose. Time hung like a bell before him, vibrant with light and unlimited depth. The sun was cold, yet flaming, alive and monstrous. Now unfold, he thought, and gazed directly into it. He teetered on the edge of some old ecstasy and horror as he recognized the tumescent godhead. Light ruptured the membrane of his eyes, lunged through the hollow sockets, poured and flooded the brainpan, filling the empty head with radiance. He was alone now.

This was the real thing at last, thought Gershom, staring. The real thing at last. Debussy had once said that music was not to be listened to when nature itself was accessible. Now he guessed what Debussy had been driving at. The world of artifice was feminine. It seduced the senses with half-shocks and half-allurements, with masked invitation and coquetry. At best, it appeased and gratified without sating. But the world of natural phenomena was thoroughly masculine. It took direct hold on the senses, possessing them unsubtly. It raped brutally and impersonally. Hence man's immediate relationship to the natural world could only be an irrational one. To truly exploit that kind of relationship he had to be a primitive or a mystic or a paranoiac. He had to surrender himself completely, forgoing all his intellectual gains. Old Lear had the right idea, unbuttoning himself to wind, rain and the naked quivering thunder. Had an artist ever done that? No, though some had tried. Half blinded now by sun Gershom looked about him where, with every dart of eye, incandescent figures rose and slid and sunk behind the fog's tall curtain. What contemporary composer, he thought, shaping scores under compulsion to a visible world, could musically articulate this sunrise? None. None would care to. They all had retreated to the Eighteenth Century for their aesthetic, making an ideal of objectivity. Well, let them. One there was who towered above them all, and in his mind the dawn was already being composed. Gershom smiled. I. He saw the orchestra tense itself beneath a mighty arch, then spring with the cruel baton. Above incredulous heads one hundred and fifty golden tubas hoist a polychord, majestic as brass and growling fiercely at its joints, while in the woodwinds, slyly, three hundred contrabassoons juggle above their bells a spinning sea of air that sucks away all human walls and verities. Now kettledrums lewdly awake to thrust themselves past the fooled mouth, explore the inner ear and upper sinus, find each flesh, fold, breach, bone, channel, chamber, soul and socket of the body. Trombones unsheathe their mutinous flames, trumpets snort and charge, drown in the golden crucible: the oboe calls thrice, circling mournfully over the conductor's stand, till icy layers of the flute and clarinet dissolve to singing blocks that violincellos carry out beyond a skyline. Violins, warmed and iridescent, at last ascend the empyrean where they burst into fugue: stretto for a million dumb un pitying voices, like swarms of crystal angels whistling through a sunlight. Gershom deeply breathed. It was all there, locked up inside his furry skull, and he stood some time on the breakwater thinking about it.

His feelings were sensual now in the solitude. He pissed into the water, watching yellow urine spring from his dark pink flesh in an arc and brightly fall: pale steam arising where it tinkled on ice. Sun and fog were slowly losing their redgold: the light was dazzling like silver. He found himself classifying his sensory impressions. Smell had been the weakest, though some minutes ago he had tasted in the air a honeyed fragrance. That was gone. Sight had blinded. Sound was the most engrossing, falling into a complex tonal and rhythmical pattern:

- (1) his footsteps
- (2) the birdcries
- (3) the churchbell
- (4) the melting ice
- (5) the skull's equilibration of an atmosphere
- (6) the stifled shriek of a nerve
- (7) the bone rolling in cupped socket
- (8) the blood grating through memory
- (9) the mind's thin crooning

The faint squeak of ice as it melted was highest and most fragile of all the sounds he heard. What was its pitch? He noticed the edge of the icedriffs breaking into white rectangular chips that soon became transparent on the water's surface. The steady flow of wind was causing his ears to ache: his nose was running into his mouth. He wiped his nose with his fingers, startled as he did so by the foghorn's intimate bellow. How long had that been blowing? He smiled wryly, then turned and started walking back along the breakwater to the distant shore. The Twentieth Century man, he said aloud. Noble seclusion is not for him. Walking, he suddenly realized that the foghorn must have been blowing ever since he set foot on the breakwater. Why hadn't he consciously heard it? Each bellow was round and deep, coming to abrupt crescendo and filling every corner of space, then falling away to multiples of itself that mocked from all horizons of the fog and sun. Perhaps he had heard it more fully than all other sounds, its heaving cry of inhuman warning or despair the ground bass upon which all of his momentary sentience and reflection had developed. Perhaps he had been hearing it faintly all the long night, so that when he reached the Lake in the morning he had deliberately stopped hearing it because he didn't want to hear it: the monotonous voice that spoke too darkly in his heart for the human city from which he had been trying to isolate himself. There, now, was the city before him in the morning sunlight, and the foghorn's stupid augury was still shaking the

far air. It was in his ears, still, as he struggled up the steep wooded bluff to the empty lot, crossed Prospect Avenue and climbed the stairs of an old frame Victorian boarding-house to the darkened room where Margaret his wife lay sleeping in bed with her mouth partly open and her heart fluttering in her chest and throat. It was the year 1943, a March Sunday morning. He had known that all along. America was at war with Germany and Italy and Japan, and he had just finished working a night in the toolcrib of an industrial plant that manufactured milling machines for the production of munitions. Now the day crew was going full swing among the rattle of time and money, the illusion of precision, the oily machine-stink, the womanlooks bold in the air as birds, and somewhere in this city moved cunningjointed and wantonfleshed the girl whose secret smile and genitals had burned darkly through the besieged night from a thicket of crane controls, and whom he felt just then he could never forget. He went to a window and raised a shade, admitting his possessions and his life to the day. History, he knew, was spinning like a top. The Allied troops were retreating across central Tunisia, leaving machines and many dead lying on the plains: the Russians were defending their territory against the Germans along a fifteen hundred mile front, stretching from Leningrad in the north to Novorosiisk in the south. He knew various countries were sinking each other's ships on the high seas and bombing each other's cities, that the biggest aviation merger in the world was soon to take place in his country America. He knew fifteen thousand banks of the nation were ready to resume a booming business Monday with almost sixteen billion dollars worth of cash in circulation, counting the dollar and thirty-seven cents in his pocket. He knew Gandhi had just survived his tenth hunger strike while all India smoked and stunk like a hot turd, that the Jewish American Congress was asking Allied officials what could be done to save five million Jews in Europe from extermination this year, while the United States continued exporting valuable goods to fascist Spain. He knew children were doubtlessly being born and that a few people were dying natural deaths, that it was raining some place, snowing some place, hot some place, freezing some place, and that somewhere in this city the girl who operated a crane on the night shift of a milling machine factory was being secretly and moistly sustained by the same air that was sustaining him. It was all of it true, because the *Time* magazine lying before him on the table said so. He had known it all along. Eight-thirty. Margaret

stirred on the bed. He flung up the rest of the shades. Outside the fog was beginning to lift, and sunlight flattened itself beyond the eaves to slip through the tall windows of the room. The goldenwalnut panels of his console radio-phonograph began burning with a holy flame: the small white bust of Brahms looked benevolently down the world. His dwelling place was awakening with light. The walls and ceiling turned a translucent blue, soaring away from him into space. Behind the molding rats and roaches fornicated joyously before his eyes. Oh what a bustle there was! There in the blue air hung the shelves filled with his small collection of books and records. Behind the redandgold covers of *Ulysses* lay the whole multifarious city of Dublin, bronze by gold heard the hoofirons, steelyringing, Imperthnthn, thnthnthn, and Joyce dissolved in earth with mold and the running waters: there was Lewis Carroll, no room! no room! and William Shakespeare. This has been some stair-work, some trunk-work, some behind-door work: they were warmer that got this than the poor thing is here: there was Funk & Wagnall's *Standard Universal Dictionary* and Roget's *International Thesaurus*, all waiting for him in the Sunday morning sunlight to violate their immaculate and steadfast silence. Beneath them in a severe row, gold print on black simulated leather, stood the record albums, waiting, a whole new country of sonorities coiled tight and compact as a spring in the hidden ridges of wax, waiting, ten conductors and a houseful of musicians ready to spin around on a pivot faster and faster and faster till they spun out a man's singing and laughing and weeping from the entrails of a machine, hush now. Sunlight whitely grinned across the faded carpet, leaned brokenly against a wall. Hush now. There were the blockprints hanging level with the eyes, devouring the feeble vision with their black and white ferocity. There was the small mahogany desk, stuffed with clips, pens, pencils, paper, odds and ends of old rumors, vanity, deceit and all his unpaid bills. There were his manuscripts lying unseen behind the closet door, some several hundred thousand words written against the violent ringing of a bell, the sly knocking at the door, the polite treacherous cough at the elbow, the soft terror of a hand on the shoulder and the insult of an intimate gesture: words read by none and lying now in that fast darkness of the shut closet, lost, barren, meaningless, brothers to all the impotent words in the world that wait beneath the surface of reality like blind and mouthless pupae. Yet they were his and he kept them alive in anger and despair and certainty. One triumphant day they would

burst the chrysalis and explode in a whirring cloud from the closet: they would fill the room, their soft merciless wings tickling the groin, the stomach, the rectum, their fierce mandibles eating out the heart and eyes: they would swarm from the house and descend upon the cities of men, darkening the sky with the color of blood: they would dazzle and destroy, pick clean the white bones of skyscrapers, suck out the rotting shells of tenements, leaving the earth pure and sweet for him to wander forever with his loves: O all the dollies and dioxies who confounded with trick flesh from the papers, theatres, barrooms and street-corners to bring him pruriency, to stimulate today his function of progenitor in a state that still needed its widening armies for for its narrowing ends. He stretched his arms above his head and grimaced. The year was 1943 and in the Sunday morning sunlight of that time men, women, children and small animals were ending their lives in an ecstasy of violence, while behind smooth facades of newspaper print others were grieving, taking their profit and planning the day's diversion. Barrooms all over the land were being aired of small defiances the reek of cheap whiskey, inconstancies, the flavor of sloe gin, loneliness the terror of canned jazz, courage as sharp as broken bottles, bewilderment as gaudy as a hundred-foot billboard. Last night's debauchery had been discarded in white rubber prophylactics that were drying stickily in the morning sun. Yesterday was as stale as the unemptied ashtrays in a thousand hotel lobbies. In the radiance of this room his sins were receding behind him, original, venial and mortal: sins like clots of semen in a wad of paper, sins like shameful cowering in a back hall, sins like moldy bread, broken locks, soft whimpering, out-of-tune pianos, raw meat, dry mockery, decaying jaws, sudden rage, insane laughter and empty windows, sins the color of Lifebuoy Soap, spilled cough-medicine, dim electric light, dried blood, attic dust, cellar damp, clogged sewers and faded print: all of them disappearing behind him into the transparent morning. He took off his dirty work-clothes and stood naked in the room. Margaret smiled at him tightlidded, pale in the loneliness of a dream. Should he rupture sleep's thin integument, that enfolds her like a womb? Did he dare let a fart? What was doing in the world of sport? How were the comicstrip heroes getting along? Where did the rich hang out? Who was preaching today's sermon on the beatitudes? He removed an album of Bach's sonatas for flute and harpsichord from the shelf. He took out a record. He opened the panels of the console radio-phonograph and placed the record on the

brownfelt turntable. The console exuded a heady fragrance of oil and metal and polished wood. It was costing him three hundred and fifty dollars, and he still had seventy-five dollars left to pay. He turned the volume switch. The jeweled lights and green eye about the station indicator glowed palely in the sunlight. He snapped the turntable switch. The record began spinning silently through the morning until it became soft and impalpable, a whirlpool of darkness, the dizzy grooves taking depth and fluidity of pattern from the aura of white light riding the concentric progressions: the red and gold label in the center—unceasingly assaulted by widespaced grooves moving in upon it—turning about the chromium spindle just fast enough to be unreadable: Sonata No. 2 in E-flat Major, Allegro moderato (Bach) Yella Pessl and Georges Barrere, Harpsichord and Flute. All right. Yella Pessl and Georges Barrere spinning around in a corklined room, hands poised above the keyboard, silver flute held ready to the lips, spinning. An emanation of Bach hovering in light above the ebony depths of a revolving disk. Our Father Who art. Seventy-five bucks plus interest or else. Rape on South Kinnickinnic. Another secret treaty signed. Grease my palm for a government contract, pal. The invisible ether bruised and quivering with all the nation's Sundaymorning radio programs, I come here to speak for Joe, there's a starspangled banner waving somewhere, latest newsreports from the booming depths of an announcer's belly, hymns, prayers copulating in the unseen dimensions with advertisements on a cure for piles, on dogfood, used cars, cemetery lots, war bonds and so on, but in this room only Margaret's breathing and heart bumping, the expectant sunlight waiting with the turning record. He lifted the curved brown metal tone-arm. Its sapphire tip was as alive as a roach's antennae. He placed it on the record's outer edge. From behind the bronzebygold damask, set in a paneled square, came a faint high hissing. Hush now.

Now.

The room alive with the thin wiry sound of harpsichord.

In the beginning.

Let there be light.

And there was light.

The silversweet sound of a flute progressing hollowly through the joyous air.

Everything falling into place.

The heart of a man singing in the morning, in the sunlight.

The year was 1943 and the day was Sunday, hush now.

Hush.

No need. No need to. Not now. No need at all.

Margaret opens her eyes on the bed.

Around him the walls of the room stand naked.

Hush.

No need. She smiles like a child, arches her body.

He stands naked in the rising waters of sound, awed by the living shape of light upon them.

The diumvirate of flute and harpsichord.

Hush. No need. Bach. Everything in place, self-contained, pure and terrible and exalted as 2 plus 2, shape of an O, walls of a room, solid as the floor and ceiling, definite as rent, no need to talk, think, feel, look or do, just listen, shhhhhh, listen:

The sun is rising on the Lake, it says. There are gulls and wild duck on the water, it says. There is life and death and birth in the world, it says. Men are forcing other men to kill, it says. Men are forcing other men to work away their lives for a rotten promise and a little bread, it says. You got seventy-five bucks left to pay on that phonograph, it says. A room has four walls and a floor and a ceiling, it says. Margaret is your wife, it says. As simply as that. Tells him sweetly and terribly with the flute singing its silvery hollow song in the sunlight.

Hush now hush.

It's a pretty big room and a pretty big world, he thought, but not big enough to hold all the hate and fear and guilt and love and pity that I'm feeling, brother. And the joy. I stand naked in the morning, four walls around me, rent paid, and hush, the flute, higher and higher.

What do I do next?

Eat breakfast? Lay my wife? Fire a machine gun into an approved enemy? Send a letter of protest to my congressman? Write a novel of disillusionment? Build a bridge around the world? Throw a dynamite bomb at a capitalist? Preach brotherly love in the marketplace? Dance over the rooftops? Synthesize a new perfume? Dissect small fauna? Compose a love song? Investigate the nature of Reality? Begin a diary? Discourage all opposition to world leaders? Read through the Encyclopedia Britannica? Feign madness by exposing myself in a public conveyance? Relax with the Sunday editorial? Make a million dollars? Organize an expedition to explore the city sewage system? Drop ten dollars into the Baptist church collection plate? Learn two or three obscure African Negro dialects? O hush, the flute, the flute.

Bach smiling blindly into the sunlight, weeping in the heart with his god.

And what of the others? he thought, looking out beyond the walls of a room to names and faces he had seen only behind his image in the distorting mirror, friends or kin who had gestured, smiled and spoken dumbly across the polar seas of ego, now caught like himself between time's grinding surfaces, awake or stirring out of sleep, preparing to confront once more an appearance of the world they had made for themselves. Yes, they were all there, hungering and denying, affirming and destroying, staring into Sunday crazily, apathetically, angrily, bewilderedly, frightenedly, fearlessly, greedily and cruelly, O hush, the flute.

The flute.

Falling.

The music falling to an end, sweetly, terribly, sadly, with the finality and logic of 2 divided by 2 equals 1.

Now.

The room was silent.

March, 1943, Sunday morning.

O. K. That was it: the needle scratching in the final groove and the four walls resuming their opacity, leaving still the unreasonable joyous empty singing in the hollow of the heart. Gershon removed the tone-arm from the turning record and shut off the current. The radio-phonograph went dead, a nice piece of furniture, seventy-five bucks left to pay. He stood barefooted on a sunlit patch of carpet and looked out of the window, rubbing his scrotum where it itched between the thumb and forefinger. He felt good. From the south windows you could see a little ways down Prospect Avenue, arched by bare branches of elm and whitely defined in the sunlight, the view obstructed by the large redbricked rooming house across the street with its tall stained-glass window and decaying cupola. From the west window, through the branches of a backyard maple, you could see down the block upon the intersection of Brady and Farwell and Cambridge, all of it waiting in the morning with a theatrical innocence: the corner shops, the little tavern, the dirty orange streetcars, the roofs of the city, the shoe factory water tank and the tall sky only the props for his improvising. Margaret smiled at him from the bed. Her hair lay about her in rich disorder, and mortality stared through her eyes. She opened her arms beautifully and frailly to him with the uncertain beating of her heart. He felt good, singing joyously and emptily inside. Later in the afternoon, at the end of about five hours' sleep, all of it

would be gone. Dead. The same old ugly room. Boredom. Quarreling. Infidelity. War. Injustice. Nobody caring for anybody else. Dead. Nothing. No use. But now he didn't believe it. It was all inside of him, alive, singing, hopeful, and he went over to Margaret on the bed, her arms outstretched, his wife, getting set to try and tell her all about it, how it was: the factory, Sunday morning, the walk along the breakwater, people they knew, history spinning like a top, Bach singing and weeping with the silver flute: getting set to be tender, trying to hold onto her and the frail mortality that slipped away from them with the silly blood bubbling through her heart, and seeing before him as he started speaking a last image of a naked branch of maple shaking joyously and heartbreakingly in the sunlight, in the morning, in the wind.

FOURTEEN NEW POEMS

William Carlos Williams's

MAY 1st TOMORROW

The mind's a queer sponge
 squeeze it and out come bird songs
small leaves highly enameled
 and moments of good reading
(rapidly) Tuck,tuck,tuck,tuck,tuck!
 —the mind remembering
Not, *not* in flux (that diarrhoea)
 but nesting. *Chee woo! Tuck!*
the male mind, nesting: glancing up
 from a letter from a friend
asking the mind
 to be squeezed and let
him be the liquor which, when
 we released it, *he* shall be sopped
up, *all* his weight, and
 released again by squeezing.
Full, it moulds itself
 like a brown breast, full
not of milk but of what breasts are
 to the eye, hemispherical
(2 would make a sphere)
 to the mind; a view of the mind
that, in a way, gives milk:
 that liquor that minds
feed upon. To feed, to feed *now!*
 Chuck,chuck,chuck. Toe wee. Chuck!
—burdensome as twin stones
 that the mind alone can milk
and give again
 Chee woo! etcetera

APRÈS LE BAIN

I gotta
buy me a new
girdle.

(I'll buy
you one) O. K.
(I wish

you'd wig-
gle that way
for me,

I'd be
a happy man)
I GOTTA

wig-
gle for *this*.
(You pig)

SPRING IS HERE AGAIN, SIR

Goffle brook of a May day
(*Mon chère Cocteau*
qui déjeune des fois
avec Picasso) blossoms
in the manner of antiquity

Which is an obliquity
for the movement
and the sheen of ripples
bridging the gap for
age-old winnowing decay—

from then to now. Which
leaves very little
but the sun and air
unless one should prefer
a pool of human spittle

over which to grieve.
Rhyme it regularly if you
will. I say the night
is not always gay for
an old man who has sinned.

But the brook! is mine
and I must still prefer it
to the summits of Thibet
from which to take off:
—of spring, to the air

for relief! smell of clover,
cherries are ripening.
We lay, Floss and I, on
the grass together, in
the warm air: a bird flew

into a bush, dipped our
hands in the running water—
cold, too cold; but found
it, to our satisfaction,
as in the past, still wet.

THE HARD CORE OF BEAUTY

The most marvellous is not
the beauty, deep as that is,
but the classic attempt
at beauty,
at the swamp's center: the
dead-end highway, abandoned
when the new bridge went in finally.
There, either side an entry
from which, burned by the sun,
the paint is peeling—
two potted geraniums .
Step inside: on a wall, a
painted plaque showing
ripe pomegranates
—and, leaving, note
down the road—on a thumbnail,

WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS

you could sketch it on a thumbnail—
stone steps climbing
full up the front to
a second floor
minuscule
portico
peaked like the palate
of a child! God give us again
such assurance.

There are
 rose bushes either side
this entrance and plum trees
 (one dead) surrounded
 at the base by worn-out auto-tire
 casings! for what purpose
 but the glory of the Godhead
 that poked
 her twin shoulders, supporting
 the dragged blondness
 of her tresses, from beneath
 the patient waves.
 And we? the whole great world abandoned
 for nothing at all, intact,
 the lost world of symmetry
 and grace: bags of charcoal
 piled deftly under
 the shed at the rear, the
 ditch at the very rear a passageway
 through the mud,
 triumphant! to pleasure,
 pleasure; pleasure by boat,
 a by-way of a Sunday
 to the smooth river.

TOLSTOY

That art is evil (stale
art, he might have said)
was to his mind as weevil
to the cotton-head

Stale art, like stale fish
stinks (I might have said)
You are ageing, Master
Commit yourself to Heaven

CUCHULAIN

I had been his fool
 not a dog
 not his murderer

To court war which I
 redreamed
 —he suffered

To force him backward
 into the sea
 blood of his blood

Blood of my blood in
 tortured
 bewilderment

His fool, shrewd witted
 to protect
 and beguile him

To read rather
 that which I
 suffered

Not a morose pig
 his doom
 to escape only

My fate take
 upon myself
 the kindler, the

Match-man, the mind-
 miner, the very
 woman

His life lived in
 me warmed
 at his fires

A power in the night.
 Madman, clown—
 success

TWELVE LINE POEM

Pitiful lovers broken by your loves
the head of a man
the parts disjointed of a woman
unshaved pushing forward

And you? Withdrawn caressive
the thighs limp eyes
filling with tears the lower lip
trembling why do you try

so hard to be a man? You are
a lover! Why adopt
the reprehensible absurdities of
an inferior attitude?

NUN'S SONG

For the wrongs that women do
we dedicate ourselves, O God, to You
and beg You to believe
that we truly grieve.

Our defects, not fear,
drive us to seek to be so very near
Your loving tenderness
that You may bless

us everlastingly; not dread,
but risen from the sorry dead
that each may be, at Your side,
a very bride!

ANOTHER OLD WOMAN

If I could keep her
here, near me
I'd fill her mind
with my thoughts

She would get
their complexion
and live again. But
I could not live

along with her
she would drain me
as sand drains
water. Visions poss-

ess her. Dreams
unblooded walk
her mind. Her mind
does not faint.

Throngs visit her:
We are at war
with Mexico—to
please her fancy—

A cavalry column
is deploying
over a mileless terrain
—to impress us!

She describes it
her face bemused—
alert to details. They
ride without saddles

tho' she is ig-
norant of the word
"bareback," but knows
accurately that I

am not her son, now
but a stranger
listening. She
breaks off, her looks

intent, bent
inward, with a curious
glint to her eyes:
They say that

when the fish comes!
(gesture of getting
a strike) it
is a great joy!

WIDE AWAKE, FULL OF LOVE

Being in this stage
I look to the last,
see myself returning:
the seamed face
as of a tired rider
upon a tired horse
coming up

What of your dish-eyes
that have seduced
me? Your voice
whose cello notes
upon the theme have led
me to the music?

I see your neck scrawny
your thighs worn
your hair thinning,
whose round brow
pushes it aside, and
turn again upon
the thought: To migrate

to that South to hop
again upon the shining
grass there
half ill with love
and mope and
will not startle for
the grinning worm

SONG

Pluck the florets from
 a clover head
and suck the honey, sweet.
 The world
will realign itself—ex-
 cluding Russia
and the U.S.A. and planes
 run soon
by atomic power defying
 gravity
Pluck the florets from
 a clover head
and suck the honey, sweet.

SONG

Russia! Russia! you might say
 and furrow the brow
but I say: There are flowers upon
 the R. R. embankment
woven by growing in and out among
 the rusted guard cables
lying there in the grass, flowers
 daisy shaped, pink
and white in this September glare.
 Count upon it there
will be soon a further revolution.

TRANSLATION

There is no distinction to the encounter, Chloe
 there is no grace of perfume
to the rose but from us, which we give it
 by our loving performance.

Love is tasteless but for the delicate turn
 of our caresses. By them
the violet wins its word of love, no mere
 scent but a word spoken,

a unique caress. That is the reason I wake
 before dawn and crush my pillow:
because of the strangeness of that flower
 whose petals hide for me

more than should be spoken, of love
 uniting all flowers beyond
caresses, to disclose that fragrance which is
 Our Mistress whom we serve.

CONVIVIO

We forget sometimes that no matter what
our quarrels we are the same brotherhood:
the rain falling or the rain withheld,
—berated by women, barroom smells
or breath of Persian roses! our wealth
is words. And when we go down to defeat,
before the words, it is still within and
the concern of, first, the brotherhood.
Which should quiet us, warm and arm us
besides to attack, always attack—but to
reserve our worst blows for the enemy, those
who despise the word, flout it, stem,
leaves, and root; the liars who decree laws
with no purpose other than to make a screen
of them for larceny, murder—for our
murder, we who salute the word and would
have it clean, full of sharp movement

CHARIVARI

John Hawkes

COURTSHIP

1.

THEY SLEPT in separate rooms. A massive dog patrolled the space between. His big eyes glimmered in the darkness, sniffing from door to door, a weak growl.

Henry curled in one corner of the four-poster. He dreamed fitfully beneath the sagging unwashed curtains overhead.

Expositor: What time is it, Henry?

Henry: Four o'clock.

Expositor: What should you be doing?

Henry: I should be counting my gold.

Expositor: Nonsense. You should be out cleaning the stables.

Come on; we'll take you to clean the stables.

Henry: Must I do it with my hands?

Expositor: Certainly. What do you see lying over there in the hay?

Henry: A woman.

Expositor: What is she doing?

Henry: Making love to the stable boy while I do his work.

Expositor: Do you notice anything different?

Henry: Yes, she has a baby in her arms.

Expositor: What do you have to do now?

Henry: I have to put it in a bucket of water and keep it there so she can go on making love.

Expositor: Do you think you can keep it from jumping out and biting you?

Henry: I can't. It's going to bite, it's going to bite! I'll run away. I'm going to run, run...

Expositor: I'll turn *you* into the drowning baby if you do,
Henry...

Henry: I'm drowning. Help me, help me...

The dream continued off and on the rest of the night. The dog began to howl.

In her room she slept soundly, muffled up to the chin in a fuzzy quilt. A small light burned in a corner of the room as she didn't like the dark. She rubbed her feet together. They reached almost to the middle of the bed and had been that long since she had been eleven years old.

A cock took to crowing where the dog left off, a tiny fowl bedraggled in the morning mist.

Daybreak, warm and bright.

When Henry, the parson's son, got up, he thought how much he hated shaving.

When Emily, the general's daughter, got up, she thought it would be a wonderful day for a parade. She had been brought up on parades.

They said good morning in the area of the big dog. It was always chained up in the daylight.

He kissed her.

The parson's son and the general's daughter sat at breakfast, he with a spiteful irritation in his eye, glancing once, twice, unable to stop, at her meagre glass of juice, the rim stained unevenly with lipstick and the pieces of unpleasant straw-like material lying in suspension in the green emulsion. The spiteful eyes still hung together in the rude awakening of sleep, still burned. She, on the other hand, the impersonal, everlasting she, watched his heaping plate decline with a strained pleasure, watched his fingers lift the thick-lipped coffee cup to his mouth. The sun on her shoulders, she felt a pleasing depression, the warm sensation of being ignored; she brushed a fleck of powder from her nose. If either of these forty-year-old jackdaws had looked up over the crest of the hill and out of the window, they would have seen acres of close-clipped lawn rolling down to the boundaries of the apple country; they might have remarked, of course inwardly, on the beauty of the blossoms, or they might, at least prosaically, by looking at the sky, determined the costume for the day. Instead, and more prosaically, they seemed irresistibly drawn into the negative contemplation of each other. The room contained the helter-skelter conglomeration of toeless shoes, round pared nails and Chaucerian plumpness reminiscent of a general's board. Gigantic maps on the walls still outlined in

minute lines, details, and descriptions, the general's various and multitudinous campaigns. Plus a few locks of greying hair, butter melting on the already hardening toast, crumbs caught in a trouser cuff, and a soft perfume suggestive of many bygone springs. She rose unsteadily, walked in tiny steps to a dusty writing desk. Her lips pursed, she wrote. He looked harder into the trough of food. Finished, she tacked the piece of paper to the wall. It read, "dinner at one." She considered a moment, put her hand on her hip, pulled at something, then with a violent little twist of the wrist, put a question mark at the end of the phrase. He heard the door closing in the utmost of caution and deliberate consideration.

Down went the napkin in a fragile neglected heap. The last bit of stubborn sausage rind left disturbing savage testimony. The fork hung in a mentally deficient angle on the plate. He felt in his pocket, the deep catchall of good taste and felt with warmth the assertion of the paper that his fingers found, a to-whom-it-may-concern graph and history of his intelligence quotient in good standing at one hundred and thirty. He lit a cigarette, and in his own impeccable manner, made his way across the floor of bric-a-brac. Old college dogs with twenty years of age, and Papal dolls stuffed with cotton were sad at having been daunted in one glorious almost forgotten day. His toe disturbed a little faded bag of pine scent and trod on an ivory god. He found the door he was looking for, let his fingers slip a few moments on the brassy knob, then descended into the frictional paradise of his own room.

She stood before the glass, puff in hand, desperately unhappy and desperately pretty, face to face with all the peeking, denouncing photographs on the three walls. If only daddy could see her now, his stern lip would quiver at the injustice, his completely beribboned chest would heave in consternation. She could forgive him now, poor petty dear. And her mother's jade eyes looked out, not up, in sure unrelenting hostility. After all, she saw as she focused on the Egyptian dame of herself in the mirror, she had sacrificed all this libido and all this beauty on the incriminator in the other room, and could neither ask, and hated herself for wanting, to be spared.

He messed with a spotted, endlessly cumbersome cravat. He thought of her, the resistless feline eyes, the phlegmatic voice, the smallish bundle of uncompromising mental ways, thin hair piled on the head, throwing the picnic scraps upon the ground.

She thought of him, brute. Unknowing, egoistic man. A burst of pity.

He longed to go into her room and make it up, to show her all the other things he felt.

She wanted to ruffle his hair and hold his head on her mothering bosom.

They met, near one, two different people.

2.

They stood receiving at the door, he trying to hide, and at the same time excuse, his amazement at the dapples, piebalds, greys, and blacks who streamed pretentiously past his outstretched hand. He stood uncertainly beside his dear bright wife who tried to keep a garbled account of the fleeting uninteresting faces: Mr. and Mrs. Gaylor Basistini of the short height, Dr. and companion Smith with a monocle, little Man and Lady Wheeling Rice, a ruddy monster from South America, impeccable Mister and Madame Bird, a determined unnamed adventuress in green, Sir Dewitt-Jones in blue, the Ottoes and their young son, restless Mr. and Mrs. White, an ungracious daughter, the Demonoes, the Burgesses, shy Mr. and Mrs. Young, an unmentionable bevy. At the very last minute, enter bubbling, vicious little Noel in glory. Awkwardly, and in a hurry, they sat down. Then came her parents, followed by his. The butler began to serve.

Fingers sought, amid the gross confusion of heavy, disturbed silverware, to separate a knife or spoon, to tuck an unsoiled napkin beneath a powdered chin. "Oh, Mama, how could you?" followed by an unsteady blush, circling up beneath young pointed ears. "Yes, sir, we won all right." And have you heard, or do you think we are likely to hear what very private shames and resentments and misgivings these people are harboring? May we be cruel enough? He managed to convey a solid frontier while waiting to drop the fork into the beef, then felt his casualness wither away at all the provisional commands for proper cuts, accompanied by gestures, anecdotes, and grimaces that echoed and rebounded from his right and left. She felt a pantalooned and properly pressed knee graze her own. What would Papa think, what *can* he think? "Regular good stuff," the old man thought, his private orderly standing stiffly, unconsciously, unhelpfully behind his chair. Somewhere, someone's forgotten misbehaving baby howled. Calmly Mrs. Rice's tongue lashed about inside her red cheeks and with a calculated movement, dislodged

a stringy unrecognizable left-over. Her eyes sought out the hidden glass of ruby port in an anxious appeal. A fattish man, completely unaware, with a sudden desire for enlightenment, turned a question at a coquettish, aged head. "Who are they?" he asked. The head turned slightly towards him, a side of the face merely moving as a muscle twitched. The grey eyes looked back into the plate. The fat man grunted, began to finger his well-concealed belt.

Henry was still carving. His fingers trembled deliciously. He cast his eye down the cluttered expanse until he found the decayed form of the general and fixed him in a mean feminine gaze, "sending all those poor chaps up to be cannon fodder, unforgivable." Back to the meat. She was laboring under her heavy secret. "How awful," she thought, "not to be able to confide even in Mama. And something like this could be dangerous at my age. What would Henry say? Perhaps he would be proud." A shudder. *Thing* inside of her! He felt the butterflies under his shirt, but continued to pass the plates down to Gaylor Basistini. Good old Gaylor, his one real friend, mousey little man, how good he was, his steady face, reaching up hand after hand to take the plates. Reassurance from the mousey man, a knowing look. She excused herself, please, from the table. The butterflies flapped violent wings.

3.

Henry Van, perturbed, his stomach still unsettled, his mouth forewarned of gastronomical acidity, crept into the den through the noiseless underfoot protection of a polar bear rug. He inched his way into the darkness. Beneath the steel, concrete, and mahogany floor, the guests were clattering in great pomposity in the game room. Under cover of glittering and seductive exhibitions, internal abdominal rollings, machinations, and exertions were oilingly at work. Above the game room and her fortunately estranged spouse, Emily sat happily arrayed among septic bottles, silver tubes, rubber tubes, and bunny slippers, confronted on all sides by mirrors decorated with hearts and flowers. She dipped her fingers into cream and listened to the running water. She was joyful in her lonely vigil and in making her painstakingly thorough examination of herself. Henry sat dwarfed by the radio, which reared itself to six full feet, a present from his general-in-law of the medaled set. On his right, Henry found himself under the scrutiny of the solid eyes peering from his

photographed handsome father's clerical head. At the moment, possessed of no recourse, having neither the sense to run or the goodness to resent, or the ability to withstand these not-too-well meaning troops of guests that pushed and stayed, Henry simply turned himself over to the rapid tic-tapping of his foot, and the slight discomfort of a headache. He welcomed the release of a short doze.

An inward consciousness of his inopportune match with the little physically-preoccupied woman up above, drove him into a sleeping activity. He had bills to contend with, even though there was an endless supply of money. He had awnings stored in the basement that had to be put up. He had dogs to be spayed and ponds to be stocked with silver fish. He had dental plates that were absolutely worthless. He had a priestly father who resented almost everything, who rode sometimes upon a mule, and who disliked Henry most of all, a man with whom Henry would have to speak before the afternoon was ended. The sleeping, dyspeptic body began to move. Suddenly there was a blaze of lights; someone was shoving a drink into his face; another proffered a bunch of flowers; someone held a golden cigarette case and a match popped before the startled eyes. The violent voices descended upon him in unkempt joviality, eager arms clutched and stuck to his shaking shoulders. On the periphery of the agitated circle and uncontrolled laughter he could almost discern the helpless feeble face of his feeling friend, Basistini. Lost. . .

Upstairs, she was thinking, fanned by the fluttering pairs of drying stockings. She was going to have a child. She was afraid. All our neighbors lean on physical oddities, but I will not be odd, I will not let them leer at my progeny, she thought. She dabbed at perspiration with a tiny cloth. How could Henry do such a thing? If only she could get off into the mountains. Suddenly, without thinking, without knowing what it was all about, she *was* afraid. Quickly, she pulled on her shoes.

She reached the middle of the giant staircase just in time to see Henry being carried off by the great host of friends, off like an adulterer riding out of town on a rail in front of the vast guffawing crowd. She saw his hopeless eyes for a moment, not even conscious enough to make appeal, Henry in tar and feathers and so completely miserable. And all at once she felt herself succumbing to unburdening peals of wild laughter as the last of the group disappeared through the French doors, Basistini trailing behind.

Henry looked from one unrecognizable face to another, felt a suspender-snap pull loose from his trousers, groped in his hip pocket for a damp handkerchief. He felt the murmuring wind through the game room windows, and became conscious of the adventuress in green, idly and unspiritedly commanding his attention. All of a sudden the arms let him go, the mob dispersed in little wrangling groups, and there was the girl. Absently, he at least had presence of mind to notice her.

"Having a good time?" he asked.

"Why, sure, I suppose so," she said, reaching his spirit of the thing which he, of all people, noticed. Her popularity is a pity, he thought. He himself had dropped, in thought, into that prosody and ununiqueness of his disturbed kind, straightening his tie, smoothing the jacket. He thought her eyes had an angry tilt.

"May I get you a drink?" Another try, unimportant, forced, without meaning.

"No, I don't think so. Feeling a little empty."

They walked upstairs in the direction of the kitchen, her fingers lightly on his arm.

I'll have to speak to father *sometime*, he was thinking.

They discovered a platter of odd-size celery stalks, the centers carelessly lined with cheese, slightly discolored with red pepper. Although it was only four in the afternoon, the celery stalks had the withered, after-party look, dismal and lifeless. Henry, now increasingly nervous for no reason, snatched one of the more blossoming bodies and offered it, with his great eyes wide, to the girl. She opened her mouth. He stuck the oval end between her lips, the spongy stalk protruding out with its drooping, yellow leaves.

"Thanks," between mouthfuls.

"I don't suppose I'm a very good host," he said.

"Why not, Vanny? I think you're doing very well," she said, brushing the hair away from her enormous throat, "taking care of Emily's intruder nicely. All progressing as I'd like to think you'll let it. Haven't you got anything besides celery?" Henry looked for a moment: coldness in her green eyes. Then pushing and pulling inside of the refrigerator, he emerged with a frosted bottle of thick tomato juice.

"Now if I can find the glasses," he said, and began to rummage through shallow, secret cupboards. Methodically looking, piles of aluminum pots, another wrong closet. He felt her behind him. Because of her smiling knees, her mannish voice, and ac-

quired rouge, she reminded him of "Christabel's" friend; similar, though not in desire, at least in spiritual mystery and saintly odor. He could see her, long-limbed in the dark forest.

"Here we are," he said and poured two potions.

"Skoal," she said, the glasses touched, and for the first time she smiled, a bashful, yet satisfied, womanly, momentary grin; perhaps as the regal friend of Christabel would smile at the peak of the moment in the middle of the night. Her eyes grew brighter with faint intoxication. Then she lapsed back into her sad-eyed implicating act. "Healthy boy and healthy girl." She emphasized the word 'girl.' Henry made a gurgling sound and sipped the juice, aperitif of a grey-eyed fawn. She lolled complacently in green on a kitchen chair. She raised her head in a devouring gesture.

The sounds of the party were no longer confined to the gameroom, but seemed to start and jar uncontrollably from every conceivable hole and cranny in the house. Hearing the high-pitched marauding voices, Henry felt an uncomfortable anger in the pit of his stomach and a desire to lash back.

The adventuress's breath had been made to grow a little stronger, her shoulders tilted back.

"Wouldn't you like to sit down?"

"What? Oh, no, I really think I should go and find my father. Have you had enough to eat?"

"Certainment, my Vanny," she said and collected herself. She accepted defeat and unrecognition as easily as if they were going up to his plush master bedroom instead of into the drafty hall.

"The moving finger writes," she said, and Henry's writing was choppy from habit. They left the isolated kitchen ward.

4.

Parting in the semidarkness, he stood alone, and though he couldn't see it, he faced a full-jawed daguerreotype of the general, his hair trimmed down in a Prussian cut. Henry hit the door-jamb, recovered and placed a retaining hand against the wall. The small wires, hung dangerously across the air to strike unwitting men beneath the chin, began to hum menacingly. Childhood goblins arose: "Sister Ann, sister Ann, do you see any Saviour at all coming?" "I see only donkeys raising dust in the evening and dust in the morning, and the pugilistic form of Noel chasing *femme* to *femme*, only the little nervous wife sitting on

Caesar's bust preening her black wings." "Oh, dear sister Ann, what *can* I do?," as he felt the shadow of the sword above his head. He stood alone in this hallway that seemed like an underpass, passing below the antics of those in hell's seventh circle up above. Henry heard the buzzing bees, the long-billed tapping of a kiwi bird, the pizzicati in his eyes and ears. The frayed wires slipped from his fingers. He went reeling on, standing still, his arm just brushing a black vase, just missing a potted plant that hung tensely on a chain from the ceiling. All his fingers crossed and uncrossed in anonymous expectation, as he had learned to do as a child. He felt a delicate sensation among his vertebrae, a macabre delight, an over-all, bewildered, ecstatic fear. He partly reconnoitred with a humdrum glance; no suspicions were aroused, but as he heard a Herculean guest bellow in ribaldry, he felt the powdered gnashing of his custom teeth. He adjusted his rimless spectacles, clenched his doubting fists, and hovered over the black cliffs. Impersonality clutched at the largest and smallest of his blind spots with a clear grip and shoved his anger deeper; he whipped at the filmy egg with a constant beater. The adventuress, and Emily too, were as far from his mind as the wind he had heard, or his rough, degrading ride of the previous hour on the backs of his plebeian, cross-bred, plunging guests. Now he must whip and find his father. He began to retrace, over the path of his violent exit, his steps to the half-safe den.

The general's wife was a lean woman who had adopted her husband's stature and calibre. Her calling cards were printed, "General and Generaless Soris Smithson Valentine," and she carried them in a small, black leather case. The generaless now sat, with the sleeping general, in one corner of the den, visiting with the parson and the parson's wife who sat in the opposite corner. The parson rolled his big blue eyes, and smoked a clerical cigar. Henry's dame mother sat quietly at his feet. The generaless commanded the room in unfriendliness by her clear green stare. They waited, unknowingly, for Henry with some sort of determination.

In the growing darkness, people tittered back and forth from crevices to kitchen, broke glasses, soiled the rug, and made lewd exclusive demonstrations. Two unclaimed canaries were fighting in a gilded cage.

Emily sat in a yellow chair, her stubby calves drawn up beneath her, not quite the center of attraction. Noel was running around her little throne, talking at her, but glancing vivaciously

outwards, afraid to give her all of his complete and undivided exhibitionism. Each time he passed, he tweaked her knee or slapped her ear, and looked from side to side for laughing male corroboration or exotic female indulgence. His cantering became more suggestive.

The monster from South America was taking it all in with suave approval.

The ungracious daughter left the room for intimate, private purposes, in haste.

Emily guarded only her stomach, which she thought was swelling, from Noel's explorations; she suffered his other insinuations with innocent hospitality, never for a moment doubting what she considered to be corpulent sincerity, but what was actually nakedness of intent, gross body with the girdle wound about the stomach, unelectrical, and hidden beneath dusty layers of flesh. She bobbed to and fro in the wind of his gyrations and contortions. The monster rubbed his thighs; the ungracious daughter looked disturbed; and Mr. and Mrs. White sat mutely talking. Noel's pose was flawless, very loud; it was all a joke, but one sustained on a serious, determined, biological level. Each gesture of his hands grew deeper. He flitted in a tighter, more insistent sphere with each advance, soft and airy in his tights, seeking hopefully fine areas of sensitivity, overestimating Emily.

One by one the audience disappeared: one to the stables because he liked the smell of hay, another crawling down the stairs because he couldn't walk, another with his tail between his teeth, the ungracious daughter back to the lavender retreat. Six o'clock and the room was shadowed, guests were dropping off to sleep throughout the house; the apple blossoms at the end of the lawn breathed an artificial nostalgia. Emily and Noel were two round, pink ghosts. He flung himself on the arm of her chair. His nostrils flared. He fidgeted.

Emily felt his numbed fingers tickling her throughout her senses, felt them only as coarse foreign matter. Noel worked to arouse that gigantic passion that was only in his own imagination. His hand slipped and slid over flat smooth surfaces. He teetered on the arm. Behind his comedy he planned; it would be a difficult thing curled in the chair, perhaps the floor.

She was just as bad on the floor as she was in the chair.

Noel's scope was enormous, pathetically phallic, whether in partnership or not. But his emotional pattern was always loveless. He had insidious and uncomfortable talents for satisfaction and exuberance. He was never daunted, but always too unsubtle,

too pugnacious, too jolly, too stimulated, too ready and quick. Always ready, willing or not. He was the life of the party, but had to be beaten off with a stick.

He crouched above, beside, below, and around Emily. He looked for a light in the little eyes, tried to make her fingers move. He pinched.

Emily lay quietly on the floor, head propped on an arm, thinking of little sweaters and things. Didn't they teach something about it in school nowadays? How unpleasant. She plucked at her skirt's hem that casually tarried on the middle of her thigh. Several of her friends had children and didn't make out too well with them either, conceived in eating, born in the bathroom. Over Noel's frowzled head she could see, out of the impersonal window, the nightly blue sky. How peaceful. All at once she remembered her mother's words, "Don't ever let a man do *that* to you!" The generaless had looked very stern. Quickly Emily climbed to her feet and without a backward glance, trotted out of the room. She left Noel wriggling, wriggling all by himself.

She went to find Henry, to see what he was doing that she wouldn't like. Him! And possibly she would approach the generaless.

All of them are elders, bawdy old-folks, clustered around the water hole. In succession they peer down milk-white shoulders to seek and relish the sight of younger elders. They chatter among the reeds. They shake their linen vestige and scatter saline calling cards. They ride in *petit* leather saddles to the hunt and are entirely harmless. Though they peek. And they worry. Beneath all of their eyes, beneath indifference, and fish and wine, is a humorless apathy. They are stately and gruff; they wear laurels. Their ankles sink in the water by the bathing pond. They stare.

The general woke with a heavy start to the prodding of the generaless's slender swaggerstick between his blunted ribs.

"Really, my dear," the poor old man complained.

"Come, come, Soris, none of your terms of affection. Up, up," she ordered in her best clipped sergeantmajor's tone, "up on your feet. I believe the fire needs attention." The general arose, trying to conceal the stinging tears and discreetly smoothed his coat. Beneath the coat was a soft shirt, beneath the shirt a wide thin undershirt attached to a pair of flaming blue shorts. In the last few years, the general had grown to well over seven feet and had expanded, and the brilliant shorts were so constructed.

"Faster, Soris," a curt command. He turned, bristling with

effort toward the fireplace. As he stooped, his face was caught for a moment in the round, concave mirror over the stones, and was twisted into a red-eyed drawn distortion.

"Heavy," he grunted in his most childish tone. "Awkward," and he slipped. Rough, green logs fumbled over the dead coals.

The straight-backed militant spoke: "Enough!" The general seated himself again, may I?, at last.

The generaless continued, "Parson, Beady, draw your chairs over here. There is something we should discuss." The parson and his wife clawed to life, looked about, then together dragged the parson's heavy chair across the floor of the cold room. They seated themselves, Beady again at the parson's feet. The generaless took a deep breath, threw back her head, stood up on the chair, and began:

"The general has forwarded some information to me that is of vital concern to us all." Her tongue clucked and hissed, she swayed and felt an itching on the underside of her gaunt thigh. Suddenly her voice jumped a half tone, she shifted her slippery eyes. "It's a damned folly for anyone to let her go on like this," the general thought.

"As you all know," her glance included the farthest isolated corners of the empty room, "Henry has been speculating in something or other, I know not what, for the most part of his life. You, as his parents, and we, as his parents-in-law, must hear, and act upon, this report. . ." The parson's jolly fingers stopped playing with the pleats in his gown, Beady huddled closer to his knees. "Damn," said the general, "damn," and the generaless continued, "Henry has suffered a loss." She stood stonily in triumph, and her fish eyes bright in a glaze of glory. Then she fumbled.

"I feel that it's up to us to say something . ." she paused, all at once slightly agitated, an embarrassment that was difficult to meet, to comprehend with her tactical wall broken for a moment. She blinked her eyes, no longer fish-like. Silence.

These poor people. We should pet them; we should take care of them. But we must not make an obligation of it. Send them a painted teapot, perhaps, listen as attentively as possible, be prepared to write a simple postcard, nothing more. They are so flimsy, apt at any moment to be blown away forever. And we too, perhaps, with them if we are not careful, over the Via del Rosa, Street of Whores.

The generaless tried to collect her skeleton of prose again, tried to gather in the stock phrases that had been split under the slight emotion. She colored visibly.

"Of course, I don't want to interfere," she said.

"For my part," the parson interrupted, "I've done everything I can for the boy, trying to instil in him the principles of stability, honor, faith, piety, sobriety, sensibility, manhood, and a respect for his father. . ."

"I believe," said the generaless, "that we should try to relieve the moroseness that is probably weighing on his mind, and also try to encourage him to attempt business ventures that are less unsure, perhaps a slight admonishment is called for."

"An ugly little bit of nonsense," thought the general.

"I don't see how he could do such a thing," whispered Beady. "My poor dear boy." She lowered her head, the weight of motherhood wringing tears from her small eyes.

"Why, I remember," the general mumbled, "used to lose money on girls, all the time, never meant a thing . ."

"Please be quiet, Soris," the generaless's calmest voice, "and of course this is quite a different matter. Henry is, I think we should remember, forty years old."

That sobered the judges into a miserable silence, a thought about the passing, denuding years, not for Henry's sake but for their own. They became conscious-stricken of grey hairs and kidney pains, not destined to habitate forever, palpitation, palpitation, sleep.

Beady tucked her paling legs further beneath the youthfully cut velvet. The parson squared his head and fingered a two inch key that hung from a corroded copper-green chain. The general snorted. The generaless spoke, "I feel greatly for the boy. It is not easy to resist the temptation of an 'easy deal'." Sometimes she shocked the general. He stirred, uncomfortably. "Certainly not," they echoed in unison, like classroom children repeating dull lessons, stricken, leaning against the wailing wall, mastodons protesting. Now there were glances of hypocritical pity and agreement with each other, long faces. The general struck a match on the creamy flank of a marble cherub who clung fly-like and precariously to the fireplace.

"A little discipline, then laughter, always helps," he said and sat again on the plush uncomfortable chair.

"It is my opinion," the generaless began, "that we should wring a confession from the boy. . ." At these words Beady collapsed inside and the parson was unable to conceal a vicious snarl of "now, really." He had never liked the way that woman stood up anyway, never liked her incisive odor. "I merely mean," she continued, "that we should make him bare his guilt out loud, and then we may give him all our aid." A pause.

"Agreed," said Beady with a tiny voice, and she looked out into the dead of night.

"He's a rather crumbly sort," the general tried, a murmur of dissent, not from any loyalty but just a threat against their only target. He did not finish the sentence. The generaless tossed her head in contempt, then hissed a slant-eyed narrow look at Beady. She returned a bilious glance.

At that moment, Henry's head entered out of the black opening of the door. A general, hurried confusion.

"Hello, mother," Henry whispered.

A thousand hands reached out for him at once.

He was a gaunt, cut-up, timid little boy, his mouth awry. Henry entered the room in an arc, curving over to the far wall, behind his father's chair, then slowly drew nearer to the group, his face at the mercy of dismay. He never really knew how to act before these people, and always felt that he was expected to act *somehow*. He looked down over his father's shoulder, "It's been very long since I've seen you. I thought we might have a chance to talk." The old man didn't seem to hear. Each one of the group thought that he was the one imposed upon by this embarrassment, thought that he should never be a part of scenes like these. Black magic. Contempt. The fire flickered testily, making not the slightest impression on the chill that arose.

The generaless cleared her throat, looked about for any signaling eye, and finding none, began: "Henry. We'd like to talk to you." Her voice was stimulated by a fleeting pathos. She was enjoying herself.

"I don't understand," thought Henry, "how I always manage to allow myself to be talked to." He scowled.

The generaless resumed, "It has come to our attention that some of your speculations have proved unprofitable. In fact your last is a great loss, and hence a danger to yourself, and of course to your family. We cannot take these things lightly."

All at once Henry understood. A loss. "My God," he thought, "is that all?" He hadn't known anything about his business failure. "This is the first I've heard of it," he said. "Of course, I'm sorry." He wiped away dampness from under his collar. He was irritated that they should bring the matter up. "I'm sorry." He wilted.

The generaless immediately took up the flag. "We are too, dear child, nothing hurts us more than your unhappiness. We only want to help."

"Thank you," he said. "Thank you all."

Emily announced herself by striding through the French doors, and statuesquely still, she stood, her body hallowed in a sheet of light, all her inner character chained and thrust to the surface. She caught the words of the chorus, "Oh Henry dear, accept our sympathies, you know you can count on us." She saw him fidget. What on earth was he doing there: they should be waiting for her. Emily felt her careful little body shake. She loathed his silky-lined complexion, resented his downcast eyes, and burned to smite them all with her unhealthy burden. It was so unfair. But now before this impersonal aged tribunal she could speak with a proud anger that was only meant to shock:

"I'm going to have a baby," she blurted out in a strained unnatural daughter's voice, and tears welled up. Her little speech gathered fragments of anxiety, self-pity, hostility, and indifference. A slight patter of rain was heard. Beady mumbled incoherently. The general sat bolt upright and the parson looked piously at cracks in the ceiling, deepening fissures.

The generaless spoke, quite becalmed: "My dear, we are so happy..."

Emily began to weep, her round face caught fitfully between her hands.

Henry left the room in slow strides, his eyes straight forward. He felt a yell mounting to his lips. Behind him he heard a sudden burst of chattering voices and the drastic sobs.

He escaped.

6.

Gaylor Basistini was waiting beyond the French doors, under the rug. His small round hands were held furtively in front of his chest. His fragile mouth smiled a welcome of condolence. In the dark this little centenarian reached for Henry's hand and tossed away the black shawl, exposing to view steadfast short shoulders, trim tapering lines of a grey suit, a rose in his hair. He buzzed with muffled phrases and held his master's horse of sorrowful words.

"Henry, here I am," he said.

"Ah, Gaylor," a voice coming outward from the jurystand, then a change, charged words, "I can't stand this any longer... she's going to have a child...spying." Then his angry voice was gilded: "Come along, Gaylor."

The two men sat under the basement stairs, the bottle propped between them in the dust. Light from knotholes shone from

the liquor to their studs, to rings, and to their eyes, like diamonds of fire-points, rainbow cat-eyes. Gaylor Basistini's knowing fingers repeatedly pinched the bottle neck and filled two clear cocktail glasses with the brandy siphoned from the saddle-flasks. A tardy grin settled on his head.

"I quite sympathize with you, you know. I never was able to stand unpleasantness at all." Gaylor's voice was confiding.

The more Henry drank, the more free he was of anger, the quieter became his slender hands, the more empty were his eyes.

"I simply don't understand," he said, "I feel as if there were a hundred persuasions, attachments, curried and combed asses, all tangling themselves about my neck, all people I have never seen before, but there is nothing I can put my finger on." Gaylor adjusted his bonnet.

"Have another drink, Henry." The liquid slid over the bottle's lips and stained the doilies Gaylor had carefully spread out on their knees.

"Thank you, my friend." They stooped and drank together. Henry spoke. "My home is a microcosm of the world to me; I'm afraid I cannot name it. Perhaps I should say microbes, or mercuries running to a bar, fleet-winged marmosets, poisonous mushrooms in a Victorian age. The mam'selle of my old heart—I'm buying her up for my own death."

"Now, Henry, don't worry, mustn't give't a thought—let's have some awful cute fun—come on." Gaylor had a bad taste in his mouth, a film before his eyes; his fingers crawled up and down Henry's sleeve. His teeth had a distinctly yellow taste. The stairs and cobwebs moved. Basistini's neck seemed to grow larger, his head gyrating on its pointed end. His shirt was dirty.

"I simply do not understand," said Henry. He put an arm around his sagging friend, could feel the ribs. The stairs dropped off at a dangerous angle, thousands of candles burning at the bottom. Then Henry heard them singing up above—something about rolling eyes and on the floor. He stood up, dropping Gaylor's head, and with a set determined face, began to climb the stairs. The head lolled against the wall, then became sick.

He climbed the second flight of stairs acutely sensitive of the noise. The gathering had hauled itself out of the comatose realm of stupor, sleep, and strained love-making—but he didn't resent it.

"I say that we must have decentralization, an overall technology for the good of mankind..."

"Of course capitalism is still the backbone of the civilized classes, *and* of the others..."

"Indeed it is an art of mutual satisfaction, an objective ritual..."

"Bunch of old men over there in Rome..."

His ears alert, his temples tightly drawn, he did not hear the prophetic grasping conversation of the four, nor the gasps of Gaylor, nor Emily weeping.

"Pardon me," he brushed past an outstretched arm, visiting plunderers. He found his own room and set to weaving his tapestry, methodically preserving odds and ends, awaiting the return of his warrior soul.

He smoothed the sheet of paper before him and wrote; a man who even in his most childish moments had never seen a star to wish upon, but who had smelled the blood of an Englishman many times, who had been reared on a penny wafer and a glass of wine, who had placated and argued, never greatly disturbed.

Henry to Emily, 10:30 PM.

(He undid his collar.)

"I am not sure what has happened to me this evening, my dear, but I feel somehow concerned and want to write to you. Perhaps nothing has happened, but I believe this insecurity must be expressed.

"It is simply as if they have taken everything from me; Gaylor's understanding, love for our parents, closeness to you, even those memories, which I do not find particularly pleasant, of childhood; all gone. The house itself has become a secretive, unfamiliar place, hatching many subterfuges and maddening familiarities. I find Gaylor's fondness deeply depressing; I wouldn't know my father if I saw him; you, I'm afraid, have left. I know nothing of children; I have no memories; people in this house simply disregard me, and I cannot see them. I know it is no great calamity; no blow has fallen, except your charming but frightening news—what kind of a father would I make?—and yet I am distressed. Perhaps I would throw the baby over the parapet. Why must I always play the feminine role? Why don't they come and change my pants—forgive me please, I realize this meanness is uncalled for. We must protect ourselves from each other. It seems we haven't even got the decency to quarrel openly. But then we have nothing to quarrel about—"

Over his desk the Christ Child's face was grey in the lamp-light. Beady's face shone down beside it. Near the blotting pad his eye fell on a slip of paper: "Dinner at one?" He must have un-

knowingly taken it from the dining room. For a moment he saw the kimonoed figure. He wrote again.

"At any rate, I suppose it is unjust of me to judge or criticize our lives together, especially when there doesn't seem to be anything to judge. Gaylor got very sick tonight. I was rather ashamed of him. Still the old oppression; I'll say goodnight."

He put the letter in an envelope to slip under her door.

They wrote notes like this to each other all the time.

He put the letter under the door, walked downstairs, said, "I've had a lovely time," to a shadow, smiled, and walked out of the house.

He went slowly down the lane, still smiling.

8.

Mocked and scorned, she fled—but, darling, what delightful news, come sit—quickly as an angry water-fowl rushes into the air and cheeks blush. No longer had she this one very intimate, private possession that kept her different from all the others, no longer could she lick her wounds alone, no longer would she be able to look forward to the day of utmost confidence. Her secret was grossly illuminated with social pleasantries and parental goodwill, openly bandied about. It was no longer a precious, delicate, striking detail of the minor, inner life that was her own. She had been driven to this divulgence, not led, or coaxed, or loved into it. She simply smelled the odor of dying lilacs. Are we never going to be happy, little woman? Mother had always been a military man, that was that. She felt her hair unruffling and getting thin. Oh, it was messy.

She had stopped crying long ago, about the time she was tramping heavily up the stairs. Her face was tearstreaked, wrinkled.

Emily lay still; she would have kissed.

She didn't have very much that was her own. She had a kewpie doll for every happy party; it sat old and depleted and hypocritical near the sewing basket. It was a pretty doll though.

She listened. She heard the nightbirds singing their only language, voices up from the terrace beneath her window.

Noel's croak, "And you know what that damn little farmer's daughter did? She got out of there just as fast as her little legs could take her."

"How disappointing!"

Drunk Dr. Smith's, hoarse and provocative, "And they castrated Abelard for that, absolutely castrated."

"Shhh, darling, be quiet, got a match?"

Emily heard these words as she never heard them before.

"The whole w-o-r-l-d's singing my song . . ."

She felt knife blades running through her heart. She turned to face the wall.

She heard a timid knock on the door. Fumbling for the key, just a minute, please, and then quickly jumping back on the bed.

Beady came in.

"Are you all right, Emily?"

"Yes, of course I am."

"I was a little worried about you, dear."

"Don't worry, please."

A thin cold hand scraped Emily's. That terrible perfume.

"I'm very happy for you." Whispers in the dark.

"Thank you."

"It's the most beautiful thing I've heard for a long time. I'm going to begin to knit. I remember knitting before Henry was born. I'll make you something really nice. And small."

"You're very kind."

"Oh, my dear, please don't be so cold. I know what you're going through."

"Beady?"

"Yes?"

"Will you do something for me?" A tight voice.

"Of course, anything." An eager answer.

Silence. Then, under a quick pressure of the cold fingers:

"Go get Mother."

Beady groped through the doorway. Her shallow footsteps sounded down the stairs. Emily smiled to herself with satisfaction.

The cat's jaw broke the wings of the thin bird.

The generaless came in and put on all the lights! She strode quickly from one small globe to another and finally sat, good evening, mother, in a flowered chair, eyes focused above the bed, on the far wall.

"Beady said you weren't feeling well," crossing her legs.

"Oh, of course I'm well. I just wanted to talk. . . I wanted to see you. . ." Emily made no pretense of smiling.

The generaless was paling.

"You mustn't worry. I'll handle the whole thing. Perhaps you'd like Dr. Smith."

"Yes, mother." A whimper.

The generaless rose and began to collect the scattered magazines, picked a skirt up off the floor, one by one replaced bobby

pins into their carved wood box. Her shoulder blades hunched back and forth beneath her gown.

"Your father is very happy. He's counting on a grandson." Words from the face that could not be seen. Powder showed in synthetic layers under the white lights. She had a thin speckled bosom.

"I'm glad." An indecisive tone.

The generaless took some flowers from an old green vase, walked to the daughter on the bed, and tucked the blossoms in the crook of her arm. Emily lay there, young and round, the flowers on her arc-lamp burned shoulders, smiling her prettiest reward, a tumble-stomach little doll. It spoke, "Good night, Mummy."

"Yes, yes, my dear. Sleep well." And the door closed on the dangling mother. A second more and Emily crouched near the door, flowers hanging from her fist:

"Now you can go. You can go." She slapped the flowers against the door and dropped them all. She did an odd dance, smacking from side to side on solid feet across the rug. She got back into bed and was sorry.

Again she was up, putting out the lights.

The lack of genes, the lack of a ganglion, the lack of a seed; the moon was not right, or the baby was dropped, or the chemist was wrong, or the teacher untaught, or the night air bad, or the witch was around, but something concocted these discreditable results; something gave the little woman a bad temper, made her lonely and kept her eyes open in the darkness.

Emily watched the shadows on the ceiling, thought of a highwayman glittering out on the night road. She dozed and woke again.

Beady encountered the mastiff in front of Henry's door. "Go away," she said. It slunk off. Softly she called his name. No answer. She walked all the way down to the game room. The curtains flopped. She tried the upstairs sittingroom. She walked faster. She thought she saw a shadow and ran from it. A spiral of cigarette smoke. An owl's eye. She followed the pebbles; they did not lead to Henry. Darkness. She stumbled over a stockinged leg. "Henry?" No answer. She raced down again to face the other incarnate three: "He's gone!" Out of breath. The two men hunched forward and the generaless spoke quickly:

"Who?"

"Henry. I can't find him anywhere."

"He's probably out getting a little air, taking a walk. Don't worry, we'll find him tomorrow."

The generaless spoke again, "I wouldn't say anything to Emily."

Beady squatted in a rank position on the floor. She worried.

Emily spoke for herself, "Henry? Henry? Now where can he be?" She rolled over.

1:30 A.M. *Emily's dream.*

She was a little girl, nine years old, walking through the forest.

Expositor: Where are you going, little girl?

Emily: I'm going to grandmother's funeral.

Expositor: And what will you do there?

Emily: I'll say goodbye.

The archtypes stood around the room in black and white, the moon shone through the window, red trees surrounded the house. Father was a stern man with shiny insignia on his shoulders, and mother looked as if she would cry. The organ was caroling very softly.

Expositor: You have come a long way.

Emily: Yes. But now I am here to see grandmother. She is a very lovely lady. I would like to give her a kiss.

The little girl crept up to the bier, pushing her way through gardens of flowers. She held one of the cool hands as the minister's sonorous voice began the farewell. All of the people lost their names in tribute to beautiful grandmother. All of their quiet breaths together seemed like the breathing of the sleeping woman. She waxed and waned. I leave all my children.

Then a little bell tinkled and everyone began to put on their hats.

Expositor: She is gone. It is time for you to leave too.

Emily: No. Please let me stay, please. I don't want to go away.

A voice spoke to them all: "*We are mourned only by children.*"

Emily began to cry: Please, grandma, don't go away.

Expositor: You are almost a live thing. Come.

He picked her up and carried her outside into the quiet vale.

She felt very cold fingers against her own. Then the Expositor's face, under his black mantle, began to resemble the woman's face that had slept on the satin pillow. The voice was the wind over the organ reeds.

Expositor: You must come with me.

The face grew drawn and plastic; the eyes closed.

Emily awoke and listened for sounds in the darkness, in the vale.

The generaless walked through a maze of lights, glancing from bulbs to china figurines. The light careened in pinks, greys, and brilliant white from window panes, brass rails, whorled glass and candleholders. She carried a little tomcat at her breast, and moved through the islands of festivities to try to find the creature milk.

The adventuress in green, on the monster's back, thought she was riding a dromedary over the sand. Hand to forehead she urged her beast, and scanned the horizon for a sheik . .

Dr. Smith had cornered the ungracious daughter, who was sleepy but frightened. He was talking of sutures and instruments, and an oval abdomen.

The Burgesses were drinking beer, remarkably content.

Mr. and Mrs. Young looked at photographs.

Mrs. Wheeling Rice slept soundly on the sofa, her gown undone.

They carried bamboo sticks and cellophane to build their nests.

The generaless walked, the cat buried its head at her breast. Suddenly Noel jumped at her; he stood in her path, his boy's face beaming up, his head wagging. He looked straight at the cat who poked at the low-cut gown.

"That's all right," said Noel to the cat, "you won't get anything," and he ran on his way. The generaless couldn't, how awful, speak. The rain came down harder.

THE BACHELORS

9.

Hatless Henry flagged the bus. Its yellow eyes bore down in the mist with steaming silhouettes behind the smoked glass. The silhouettes were clothed in blue and grey. No one talked to the driver. A few looked up at the new passenger; he smiled and reached to the cash box.

"Look at da babe in da corner."

"Look at da babe."

"Look at *dat* babe."

A young woman holding a wet bundle sat in the corner. Her eyes were shaded by a little black hat, a hat above the pointed skull of a Jezebel.

Henry dropped his coin into the box and braced himself against the steel stanchions. He heard the wheel's churning the mud. He looked in the direction of the woman with the little hat. For a moment, she looked like Emily, then he looked away.

Only the splash of water on the radiator, the faint odor of gasoline, a carousel of advertisements up near the roof in the shadows, and the bus stopped. The folding doors banged, the rain sang. Then the tires rolled, blurred lights coasted by and they moved again, with the sudden sensation of wet feet. Henry jingled the change in his pocket and stared at his own reflection in the glass, difficult to recognize amid the others. When he was a little boy he went to the ugly town of Ghent, to see the fat man at the fair, and all the funny animals there. He looked back again at the woman with the black hat.

Emily?

He almost wanted to go and speak to her, to sit and chat. A red glow in the sky ahead, a pleasure dome, drifted off to the left and was lost like a cloud. He looked at the neck that protruded up before him; it was large, it was bulky, it was shaven. Scraps of paper and tiny stones clung to his shoes. No smoking. He was taking himself for a ride. Once he met the hostile eyes of the driver in the streaked mirror over the wheel and they became enemies with the whine and sigh, whine and sigh of the engine between them. Cockeyed roadmarks hurried past.

"The Saviour is coming. Do you see Him?"

"Marshes for Fine Funerals."

"Come and see our Wedding Rings."

The bus swerved around a curve and rain beat on the windward side. Henry noticed her head nodding, the black hat falling lower and lower. Before he could go back to her, he was blocked by unanimated talking faces, gathering all around him. Again he looked out of the window. She slept.

Morning. Henry rang the door bell, straightened his spotted cravat, and looked at the shaded windows. The sun was just behind the gabled rooftops and he could hear the sea still pounding down on the beach and around the wharfs, could hear the cries of a few scattered gulls. He smelled the salt air and his eyes moved back and forth following the movements of a rusted inn lamp swinging in the wind. He looked closer at the card over the bell-buzzer, faded by rain: "Mrs. Mahoney. Rooms." He rang again. He heard the clatter of broken glass, the cry of a baby above the wind, and the rattling of an automobile starting down at the end of the street. Then he heard the padding of slippers on the other side of the door and the scratching of a key.

Madame Mahoney opened the door and she clutched at her gown as the wind swirled around her ankles. She faced a man in a wrinkled grey suit with thinning light hair and rimless spectacles. She herself was a demure-looking lady, extremely short and extremely thin. Her gown was frilled and had a collar that ruffled high about her throat. Her grey hair was up, hooked and held together with stays, pins, pieces of paper, and other foreign matter. She wore a dominant heavy perfume and small gold earrings that pierced the lobes of her ears. She was prim and pretty, delicate and old, and had a straightforward masculine voice. She never blinked. She never drank tea without smoking a cigarette and only smoked during teatime. Madame Mahoney was young in heart but she had, in the past, known the pains and seen the midwife many times. Now she looked the effort.

Henry smiled at the mannikin: "Good morning, I was wondering if you had a room to let."

"Please come in." Utter graciousness.

The door closed to. The hallway was dark.

"I've only one room. It's rather small. I don't know." Her a's were very broad, her lips tight and darkly painted.

"Oh anything will do. I'm not particular. I really would just appreciate a place to sleep. Of course I'll pay you something now..."

"Well," she paused, "I suppose I'll be able to accommodate you." She crumbled the bill up into a ball and carried it in her fist.

"Would you like a bit of tea before we go up to your room?"

"No. No, I think I'd like to go right up if you don't mind."

They climbed two carpeted flights of stairs. Waste baskets were toppled over in the hall, an old fur coat was draped across the bannister, cushions were scattered on the floors, dim lights burned overhead. Pieces of newspaper were stuffed in the chinks around the windows. At one place the carpeting left off to give way to linoleum only to commence again, a more ragged, faded-looking piece of cloth. A broken pot was lying in one dark corner. At the top of the second flight of stairs they came to a bare wooden-runged ladder, straight up into the blackness, high in the old provincial house. Madame Mahoney went first, her silver slippers disappearing into the inverted pit. Henry got a splinter in his hand. At the top of the ladder there was a low door, opening into Henry's tower room where a single window looked across the main street and out to sea. The sun had never gotten any higher than the rooftops before it had been lost in descend-

ing storm-clouds. The sea was turning rough and black. Extra wads of paper were considerably crammed in the turret windows as they were up so high, but still the window shade was torn and it flapped. The shingles fluttered on the roof, tree branches brushed against the window.

"I think this will be comfortable," said the Madame. "It's very private, you know." In a single moment she grabbed the broom, swept, and dropped it back again into the corner of the bridal chamber.

"It will do very well." Henry smiled. He was beginning to wish she would go.

"If there's anything I can get you, just you come out and call. I'll come up, Mr. er..."

"Van." Henry said the word and nothing more. The old woman took a handkerchief from her sleeve and blew loudly, a foreign sound, a cry, in the room that smelled and felt like the inside of a clock.

The sounds of a bell were carried to them by the wind, nine mournful notes that whirled and fell.

"I must go down now and finish my tea, Mr Van."

"Of course." She slammed the door in her wake.

Henry draped the cravat over the back of the single chair and stood in the middle of the clock. It contained a bed, a wooden table covered with cheesecloth, the broom, a gaunt chest-of-drawers and a closet with a skeleton in it. He took off his shirt, then his shoes; Susanna entered the icy waters. He stood by the window watching the sea when his eye was caught by a movement in the street below; a woman was entering a low building holding a small black hat from the wind and carrying a bundle of fruit—she, a bartered, mythical bride, vaporous Emily. It was a slanting sea-green house with a steep-pitched roof, and she went in through the back door. Henry pulled the blind and flung his body on the bed. He pulled the lumpy quilt up over his head, brought his knees up to his stomach and fell asleep.

Madame Mahoney sat enthroned in the kitchen, smoke curling from her nostrils, sipping her tea with Millie, the midwife, to her left.

"He's a rawther interesting man," the Madame said. "It appears to me as he's suffered some sort of catastrophe. I think he's probably lost his wife."

"Poor man," the midwife said.

"He's got soft grey eyes, I couldn't help noticing."

"Poor man."

"A very quiet person with a heart of gold, I'magine. But I think he is a gentleman who takes his due, I rawther like him."

"Poor man."

"Millie, I'll have some more tea, if you please."

"Yes, mum."

The fire sputtered, steam on the iron, old paper and coals. The smells of beads, cloth, peppermint, cinnamon and seashells filled the room. The wind grew stronger. The two old ladies talked.

The storm lashed the piers, pitched crawling sea-life to the shore, covered the nets with brine, and smothered, breath after breath, the planks in foam. Aged bull-shouldered men smoked their pipes in spiced, aged rooms throughout the town. The storm hurled itself on old brick chimneys and sent the shingles flying.

"Another toddy, Jim."

"Aye, aye, Capt'n."

"And my dear," sewing lace, "you should have seen the look on that man's face."

The smell of burning logs.

The groan of old stuffed rockers.

A garden gate banged its head.

The terrible crescendo of the sea, the gigantic breakers rocked old dead hulls.

Clustered around the oil lamps, "Another, Jim."

Storm clouds and rain between the paintless houses, and they mended a little rip or sewed a button.

The howling wind.

Henry awoke at one in the afternoon in darkness and to the crash of thunder. The scent of marshland flowers was in the air and he felt an exhilaration—in the pitch of love and in the face of death. The weeds beat around the bottom of the house, doves cowered in the belfry of the church. Madame Mahoney pulled taffey, Millie stole a sip of gin. There was smiling all around and the wind smashed the ominous and joyous word of storm into every room. Henry shivered and fumbled about inside the grey clock. He washed himself in cold water in the sink off the hallway where the ladder was. He scrubbed until his skin was red, he rinsed his mouth many times. Back in the room he spent an endless and pleasurable time carefully tying the cravat, pasting his hair down with the flat of his hand, picking pieces of lint from his trousers, and trying to polish his muddy shoes. The air grew darker, a crash of thunder, until the day was gone. He went to the window and let the shade up; it stuck, got out of hand,

went up with a bang and rolled angrily for a moment. Excitement. He was not sure whether Emily was across the street or not. He peered through the wet glass, go out, go out to play he thought, and his forehead touched the cold surface. Then he saw the lighted window. She sat looking out, still wearing the little black hat, a phantom bride-elect. She simply sat motionless watching the rain. Henry felt that the time was fast approaching when his eyes would fasten onto her and hold, when he would speak. The life-giving color of the sea turned deeper and spray flew high from the slimy rocks. One more look at her in the window, her hands awaiting the calla lilies, and he went downstairs. He missed a rung in his impatience and nearly fell. He straightened the cravat, more stairs, and he heard the noise of the wind.

He joined the ladies at their festive board.

"Do have some marmalade on your toast, Mr. Van."

"Thank you. I believe I might." Madame ladled a dripping orange spoon of jam onto his gold-rimmed plate.

"I made this jam myself, you know. Have you got a light?"

"What?" Henry looked up. Sure enough, a cigarette. "Oh, of course." He held the match, a puff of smoke.

Millie poured the tea, hot and dark. The house shook, the drab little chintz curtains hung by the kitchen windows cascading in water. The three old people, with the unpleasant attributes of youth, all smiled, sharing an imagined secret in the heart of the storm. These cronies with the beaming eyes reminded Henry of two other mothers.

"Here's to you, Madame Mahoney, Millie."

"And to you, dear boy," in chorus, this elated tribunal. They drank together. Since their first meeting, Madame had pinned a few violets to her gown and now they were crumpled.

"This is one of the happiest days of my life," said Henry. His little trip, the house, the tea, charming old women, and the beautiful storm, the dame across the street, they showered him with gifts. He inhaled deeply.

"We're so happy for you; we know you'll have a pleasant stay here."

"Thank you," he pushed back his chair, "it's time I went to pay my call."

"Try to get home for supper and have a good time!"

"Surely."

The two women grinned after his retreating blushing form. He stepped out into the rain and the light went out of the window across the street.

He walked toward her house.

10.

Revelry fluctuated all night long; a single laugh would ring out; someone would become temporarily excited, and so stir the whole party awake again. Then silence, water running, the sound of "Sleepytime Gal," "The Lambeth Walk," "That's My Baby," the sound of flesh, oh, get out, and back to silence, with the curtain of rain. They were celebrating, though they never knew it, of course, while Henry wandered far and Emily stayed alone. She managed to sleep through the last hours of the night. The general, parson, Beady, and generaless never went to bed at all, but hung dizzily and doggedly on to the end of the celebration, dodging rainbow streamers and tipping drinks, bearing up under toasts.

"Here's to old Vannie, wherever his happiness is..."

"To the couple, for a nice life in a cave, ha, ha "

"May the old hunter bring home lots of bison. . . "

"That means friends to drink," someone added.

"Soris, wake up now," a violent shake.

"Here's to the lord of the castle, may he stick to one queenie . . ."

"I guess he *will*," a tense squeak, choking with laughter.

The ungracious daughter thought to take herself apart, away from the completely uninteresting life, hot, sticky, muggy with rain, and absolutely worthless people who brought the beer to tap, to foam, so flat.

They lost the last redeeming grace of manners, stifled irritating pygmies, who tried to make and make, and coughed no longer behind their hands but coughed. In the darkness they picked carloads of roses, brought them in for sweetheart's decoration, strewed them about, and never noticed them again.

A plaster nymph teetered on a table, fell, and shattered wildly on the floor. The head rolled under the piano legs.

"Hurrah, hurrah, hurrah. . ."

They were a little worse than intolerant of each other; they minimized all but themselves; everything was seen in a minor light through minor eyes. They moved in and out to water.

Drunken morning arose from a drunken night.

"Toast and coffee, dear. Wake up," the adventuress in green stood by Emily's bed, tray in hand, not too much the worse for her long night.

"Come on, darling, have breakfast."

Emily sat bolt upright. She smiled.

"Oh, thank you. How good you are."

"Think nothing of it, darling. But take the tray so I can have coffee too."

They fussed, straightening the tray. Thin wisps of steam arose from the coffee cups. Emily began to eat, quickly, a crisp piece of toast.

"I'm ashamed of myself for leaving the party last night. I was just worn out." Mouth full of toast, crumbs on the pink sheets.

"Why, that's all right, dear. We didn't even miss you." A plum between two fingers and dark lips moist.

Emily sipped her coffee in rapid thimblesful. The whole world seemed brighter somehow.

"What's going on this morning?" she asked.

"Not a damn thing now. Most of them are still half dead . . ." She pulled her skirt up to scrutinize a run, poked at it with a broken fingernail, holding the coffee cup in the other hand.

Gaylor Basistini held his ringing head down in the darkness under the cellar stairs.

The ungracious daughter slept beneath her mother's wing.

The monster from South America was cold.

One of the Burgesses had begun to weep.

Dr. Smith was telling a story.

The fat gentleman was fast asleep.

A bathroom window was open and rain covered the floor.

"Some more coffee, darling?" The adventuress held the little pot.

"Thank you. My, what a beautiful morning." Emily's head kept pointing back and forth from one sunny corner of the blue room to another, from the toy chest to the book of paper dolls, to the radio, to the corset on the chair, to the bar of cream jars. Her eyes lit up, "It is a nice morning. Have you seen Henry?"

"Who?" A pause. "Oh, Vanny. He went out for a walk last night, a long one. He's still gone." The maid of honor-elect went back to her coffee. Then: "He's pretty cute. But I never saw a man so completely uninterested. I was rather surprised."

"What do you mean?" The jaw stopped working. The adventuress raised her eyes.

"Why, darling, don't you understand me? I just mean that he wasn't attracted to me. That's all." Another bite.

Emily looked hurt. She picked at the crusts left on the saucer. It would have been nicer if Henry had been a trifle unfaithful.

"He'll probably come back soon. But he's never done this before. Oh, well, I won't worry." She looked up brightly. "Today we'll have fun."

"Sure, dear." The adventuress looked at that cracked nail. "By the way," she said, "have you got any shorts? I'm supposed to play tennis with that character from South America, and I haven't got a thing to wear."

"Certainly, I have; I'll get them for you."

"Of course, they'll be a little large for me, but they'll probably be all the more appealing. Don't bother now, I'll be back for them. Must go..."

"Thank you for the breakfast..." but the door had already closed.

Emily sank back on the pillows. Then quickly up again, and her body down over the edge of the bed to reach for a magazine hidden under it. When she settled back with a sigh she looked at the cover—a man was wearing a golden loin cloth, slim girdle, and a woman a green. She sighed again.

Joe Ottoe, a guest who had last been seen at the dinner table and who had been busy the whole night out in the summer house, even in the rain, now walked up and down the livingroom between the prostrate forms.

"Sma't piples," he kept repeating, "sma't piples," shaking his head. A short cigarette. He wore a wrinkled bright green tie. "Sma't piples." His wife was beginning the day out in the kitchen, trying to make a cool drink badly needed.

Emily, having passed the cover, flipped the pages quickly. "Oh, why doesn't he come back," she thought. Irritated. Oh, that beautiful morning, streaming with gold.

Tired of the magazine, anxious to get up but much too comfortable to move, she relaxed and gave herself over to the sun; consciously she rested each muscle, felt herself pressing into the warm sheets. It was so pleasant, so really nice to be alone. What a nice luxury. Nothing could be wrong this morning. She could hear the stamping of a horse's hoof, the steady pulling of a rake. Ducks fluttered their wings on the pond, fat yellow bills; throw them crumbs. Now if she got up, she could wear that pretty white dress. Yes, she would in a minute. A bluebottle fly buzzed, then lumbered off. She pressed her cheek against the pillow. Oh dear, sometimes things were just too much to think about, but then everything changed, somebody said something nice, you could give them a present, come for tea, dear. A small crib, she thought, with rattles and counting beads. Indeed, it would be a beautiful

baby. A beautiful day with water dripping on the small pointed leaves.

How comfortable. How very comfortable.

She closed her eyes, opened them and heard the harlequins arguing downstairs. Quickly she jumped out of bed and barefooted, hopped to the bathroom door.

Gaylor Basistini struggled up the stairs.

The adventuress and South American linked arms and stood in a corner to discuss their coming game.

Flowers turned a delicate purple.

Joe Ottoe's young son had been snared by Sir Dewitt-Jones. Dewitt-Jones was saying, "We sort of collect young boys. We lost two sons of our own, so we like to get to know you young fellows." The young son blinked.

Mr. Bird was out for a morning walk.

Someone struck up a tune on the mandolin.

"Oh dear," said Emily standing at the head of the stairs, "oh dear, this is going to be a good day." Her stomach was getting a little rounder, she thought.

"Say, dearie, what do you say you and I go out in the moonlight. . ." A recumbent figure in the dark hall.

Emily didn't notice what he said and continued down the stairs. They had put too much starch in her dress again. She heard the radio, very, very soft harp music. A beginning day.

11.

The wind shot down the main street, oscillating, shimmering from side to side, pulling with its giant tail armfu's of driving rain from the doldrums; it broke off in tangents to be drawn into a chimney flu, to swirl madly, trapped in a dead end, or to fly swiftly and vertically up the crevice between two houses, to be spent in the still aimless air high above. The main blow beat its way down the narrow street, tearing leaves from trees and rattling windows, smashed between two warehouses and jumped out to sea, tearing frantically at the waves. The rain was a'most impenetrable; it beat like nail heads on the rotting wood, and covered cobblestones with a running slime.

Henry lost his nerve. Pummeled he stood heaving to and fro, floundering, flapping wildly, in the middle of the street before her house. His hands shifted and beat the air, thrusting outward to clutch at lost supports, to maintain a precarious balance; he hung by the good graces of the wind. He laughed and felt himself shoving off at last, but he simply couldn't go to the house,

The door opened and she came out and walked easily into the storm. For a moment she was but thirty feet from him. Miraculously the black hat stayed in place. He could almost see the features of the face, oh, Emily, yes, yes, the howling wind, the shadowed mouth open to gasp for air behind that wind, the eyes covered by a constant veil, the hair beating upon the open throat. Fish were being hammered against the logs, clouds collided with mountains of water, the fishing nets tore loose, and wandering, flying, flung themselves on teakwood ribs, sky, and rocks.

For one brief moment his hope and desire came together, to walk up to her, hold her, speak to her, hold the blowing hair. The taste of salt was on his lips. Then he turned and was carried off down the street. Once he turned back and saw that she was following.

This was his gigantic hold, the town of water. He noticed each blurred metallic color or lack of color, each grey and black, each wet shadow, salt and iron of the sea and blood. Drawn to her, he fled from her, happier in each dolphin-winged spasm, careening along with pillaging, battling black birds. To catch fish. To catch grain. To shed the strengthening water. He bent his body and ran disjointedly for cover. The inn door. Pieces of driftwood were pounding on the shore; a deep loud voice from the doldrums. Sailors from Madagascar, ships from the Caribbean, the Puritan, iron hulks from Liverpool, plunging their crimson sails and tarred lines through the surf, they hovered in the harbor. No sun, no moon, only hurling starfish and fine foam, water hauling in the wizened lives.

Leather rots; rubber comes alive; the beach erodes; the fungus grows; the sound of the wailing bell. And always that barely remembered woman behind him, the faint flush of youth and scrubbed cheeks.

The wind pulled the door from his hands and slammed it shut. Conversation died. He stood facing the fire, trying to collect his excitement, to hold his spirit down here in the *Sea Horse*, a timeless inn. Wooden tables and benches were worn smooth and white and around them were massive red flickering faces.

"How d'ya do. A rum for the gentleman, Jim."

He sat down next to the big capt'n with the silver mug. The heat of the fire curled round his ankles. The ship's bell tolled five bells; it was dark outside.

There were no women at the inn. Absence of long hair, pale skin, tapering legs, and Piccadilly voices; no childish heads in

dusting caps, no Eve dressed in leaves or slinking in spangles, no perfume, nothing for the bees to buzz about.

Quite the contrary, it was a place of stags. Fat men had their vests unbuttoned, grey wrinkled shirttails crumpled out from the tight waistlines, toothless or even gumless, jowls were stained with the iodine tint of nicotine. A few of the very old wore pairs of small, round, gold eyeglasses; they constantly squinted and wiped their heavy faces with their hands. The masculine chamber, with spittle, beef and beer, the roaring fire, stench of drying cloth, the pungent odor of burnt-out pipes, and a boar's head on the wall, moth eaten. Here models of ships were hung in dirty bottles, a keg of ale with a brass spigot was green, the paintings of fish and fisherman hung crooked in the shadows. Coat tails high, backs to the flames, in forgotten rough voices the old bucks grumbled. Stags. Out of the storm.

Stags. The word stuck in Henry's mind. Men, gathered congenially to talk, to smoke, fat hands holding the claws of chairs, grew old; and plans, experiences, masters, clustered together now for protection. And one was an old black dog, scratching, to listen to the talking. Clustered together. Stags. Henry noticed the curtains drawn over the windows. The fire crackled, a log slipped down and he tasted the odor of smoke.

Gaylor had thrown a party for him the night before his wedding. Giant candelabra, evening dress, thin cigarettes, leaders of the western world, they came to a private dining room in a large hotel. Slender glasses, medals on black lapels, discreet waiters and they told their jokes. "That was a good one. Hear! Hear!" Red beef, cut with a sword-like carving knife for the fops, grew cold. Men together only for the show.

"Here's to Henry as he starts out on the sea."

"We'll drink to that!" Dinner jackets open, cigars, they tried to be informal with bald heads and tales of espionage. Henry had felt rather shy, Gaylor was very happy, claret, white wine, brandy, stories of first nights, the hunting of the virgin, expensive and false, glittering.

"To the master, may he rule with an iron fist."

Loud laughter.

"Beat her if you have to, Henry," more laughter.

Hand-shaking. Pomp. Good fellow.

He had felt terrible the next day and couldn't remember very much but millions on millions of lights.

"But," thought Henry, "this is my stag party." An old man fell to snoring. It was the party of a few healthy chuckles and

grunted cackles. In the silence these oldsters seemed to say, "Be of good cheer, be of good cheer, lad, your wedding night is stil to come." "It was all for him, the old grandads were giving him this, a stag party. Survivors of the sea, a little group of Ulysses' men with albatrosses hung round their necks. Henry felt as if the bouquet and sword were in his hand. He, the man with the returned spirit, would find her waiting, dressed in rose, a simple rosary around her throat.

The big man with the silver mug took another drink.

"C'mon, lad, drink up."

Henry gulped the hot liquor. "Thanks," he said.

The rain came down harder, but the wind was letting up. Rain coming mournfully down. A stag party. Another drink. Happiness.

Suddenly the door flew open with a gust of rain. A little white, frightened, wet face, partly hidden under a large sou-wester, poked in.

"Drowned," it yelled.

"Drowned," in a high voice above the sound of the rain.

"Drowned. A girl is drowned." The head bobbed out of sight and scurried away in the rain. There was an unhurried rustling of oilskins. Girls might have been pinning flowers in their hair for all the noise they made. Rubber boots were heavily pulled over woolen feet, snaps were fastened by clumsy fingers and hats pulled down and tied by old bearded sailors dressed in black.

Another head popped in, excited:

"C'mon, down by the pier. Girl dead." He ran off. The door had been left open and puddles of rainwater were forming on the floor. The stag party for the groom-to-be was robed with black, but none of them seemed bereaved. A last large tumbler of rum, or blowing the foam off beer, slowly with pale blue eyes over the mugs. Then they filed out of the door. Henry turned up his collar and flanked by stoop-shouldered figures, trudged out into the rain.

The wind had completely died, an ode, but it was still dark with heavy clouds. They moved toward the shore, their boots sloshing in the steady drizzle. He put his hands in his pockets. He could smell the sea animals and fish, strong wood and tar and noticed, for the first time, that all the shades were drawn in the grey houses. One or two windows showed a soft yellow from a hidden lantern. The sea was still running high. They walked slowly, their motion obscured by the flapping skins.

One by one they climbed down the rusted iron rungs of a ladder on the pier. It was darker below, a thin stretch of shore around the massive pilings, then the earth was lost into the water. A dark underground world, and here the smell was overpowering; dead marine life, carbuncles, blue jellyfish in pools, mounds and mats of congested seaweed, huge silver fins and dark green tongues, transparent bulbous forms, soft egg-like stones, thick black-blue devil crawling grass, and ancient pieces of encrusted iron. Shivering species and dead bones. A few dim lanterns cast uncanny shadows and pierced back into the inkiness beneath the soaked pier. Staunch, tilted piling, wrapped in grey, jagged and rough. Henry ripped his trousers on the vertical ladder.

A small knot of black ghosts stood in the middle of the pit of sea; water drizzled down their backs. A basket stretcher was at their feet. Coils of new rope, stiff hemp, fish eyes left from bait. A sweet-sour stench.

"Who is she?"

"I dunno. Just got into town."

"Must have been out on the end of the pier. Probably slipped and got washed back under here. Gimme a hand."

The figures bent, hands running with water. Soaked, mushy cloth, tangled hair. An axe blade glittered dully by lantern light. A shuffling of feet in the rubbery weeds. Someone puffed on a cigarette, an acid smell.

"Do ya think she jumped in?"

"I dunno. Mebe. Mebe got caught in a wave."

Hands touched a slippery surface, then got a better hold. Smell of fish.

Her black hat was caught under her head. The body was half twisted around one of the piles. She was put into the stretcher and rope was laced, criss-cross, up the front like a jacket. The face was pushed down under an arm. Pounding of the surf. They began to pull the ropes from up on the pier.

Henry stood ankle deep in water. The rain blurred his glasses until he could hardly see; his nostrils stung. He was wet through. Gulls circled overhead and cawed unmercifully. Black shiny arms and burned hands labored with the burden and with the ropes, guiding and hauling it up. He was calm; he had the utmost capacity for calmness. The storm was a whimper. A long flat shoal stretched out under the water. He passed two rescuers.

"Seems someone always is caught in these storms."

A nod. "My missus jumps to them shutters mighty quick."

Don't even want me t'get outa doors. *Like* a good blow m'self. I been wrecked twice a'fore. No more sailin'."

"I can still see that face down in the weeds, all white. Ya know, it's a funny thing, for such a sprite of a girl she shore weighed a plenty, jus' made o' lead, could hardly lift 'er. A dead weight. . ."

The conversation was lost. Henry thought he would go back home. First to the room and then home. It was his own decision; he would go home.

He opened the door of Madame Mahoney's establishment. The Madame herself greeted him with a flourish.

"We've been waiting," she said. "Do come for some tea." Her pointed eyes were inquisitive, the face zebra-striped with shadows.

"I'm afraid I'm in a hurry, Madame Mahoney. And I must leave now."

"So soon? Oh dear." Her tone was coaxing. They heard Millie sweeping up pieces of eight and glass in the kitchen.

"Yes. I must go." He started up the stairs. "I have biscuits," she said, but it was hopeless. If you want to try my wares follow me. She started for the back of the house. On an impulse she wheeled around, as if in spite; her voice was vehement, "there's someone up there to see you." But he didn't hear.

He climbed higher and higher, could only faintly hear the rain. It would be nice to get home. The little town was more tranquil and more desolate than ever. Clip, clip, clip, of scissors, the brushing of a broom.

The parson sat waiting, stiffbacked and with a scowl on his face. He held his hat in his lap.

"Hello Father, what a pleasant surprise."

"I've come to take you back, Henry."

"Yes sir." There was nothing he could do.

Together they left. It was dark. Mile after mile they drove, uneven trees and lighted houses slipping by. The headlights spotted enormous cows, then only the black edge of the road. Sweet smell, sour smell, blown into the darkness. Henry remembered long vague journeys, when as a child he had slept curled on the back seat, sleeping and dreaming, half awake, never knowing where they had come from or where they were going. The gentle rocking of the carriage, not to know either direction. He closed his eyes and saw myriads of color. The parson dozed, still

straight backed. The chauffeur drove at a steady pace, a figure in purple livery. The flowers they passed were dead. The father relaxed in his armor of years, the lover relaxed in his armor. A thick pond, gone. He saw the stars, then looked out again into the vista of the headlights. Everything was moving, even sleep. Moving sleep. He smelled the dust of the upholstery, the taste of tar, the night air. Troubadour, troubadour, playing his guitar to a lady love, speeding tires. He slumped off, awoke with a start, then settled again. No people. No barriers. No people. A lonely bird.

When they drove up the long driveway and neared the brightly lit house, Henry could hear the loud noise of a progressing party. He was bewildered, for they were there, the voices and the dancing feet.

They walked up the front steps out of the darkness towards the monstrous pale reflection.

THE WEDDING

12.

Standing before the mirror in her mended shift, the collier's wife could hear the terrible noise below. Horns clattered in the cold smoky air and streamers of orange paper flew past the window. A boy, muffled up to his chin in a flannel bandage, beat upon a kettle with a stick, crying "macaroons, macaroons." Her fingers worked quickly, coiling the single braid of hair that fell to the floor. She heard the sharp cries of another boy stuck in the chimney who struggled downwards inside the wall, showering soot before him. Large encrusted ladles lay on the hearth. A row of thicksoled boots by the bedroom wall was scraped and bright with water and soap. Her hair was finally wound, left half undone, when she spied a little pot of idiot pennies hidden in the unwashed linen in the lowboy. The coppers were black and burned, toppled over under bundles of cloth. A turtle slowly moved his arms in a porcelain dish. Long needles were lightly left in the bundles of cloth, and bitten-off lengths of colored thread were in the eyes. So skilful was she, her fingers were never pricked as they rummaged beneath the needles and cloth, ribbons and pins, to find a comb, or brush, or coin. She could see the eyes of the needles in the dark and loved the bright points. The collier himself was often stuck. There were needles in the shoulders of his coats, in the rug, on the curtains, and in the drying socks.

Quickly she put the coins in her apron pocket, wrapped an odd shawl over the shift, listened for a moment to hear the short breathing of the chimney sweep, and ran into the other room where the fire burned. A wrinkled dress was hung to dry before the open window; pieces of rag covered the floor and in the corner was the black iron bust, a p'umed hat on the neck. The tumult grew worse as children wrestled beneath the feet of men with hollow laughing eyes, and drivers cracked their whips above the village crowd. "Ah, lovely, this is surely a fine day. C'mon now, dearie, let's you and I just take a walk." The collier's wife hummed to herself. Her arm was scarred with a triangular iron burn; her shawl was a livid red. Suddenly she scooped all the pieces of cloth from the floor and dropped them into a tub by the hearth, and the dirt came to the surface of the boiling water. Steam filled the woollen-and-clove scented room. She stooped to buckle her shoe, she smelled the odor of evergreens, wine, and morning rain that came in around the edges of the hanging dress. Shingles on the steep roofs outside the window were wet and bright and one after another they appeared crooked in the morning sun. Children dragged large green limbs through the streets, and the cold bark of the forest scraped on the cobblestones. Frost clung to crumbling doorways and red ribbons were hung to the tavern signs. The collier's wife sang louder.

This was the day when the end of May joined the beginning of December. Sleigh runners cut through trembling grass, fires burned in the white streets and the Maypole dancers of early spring were carolers under lantern light. "Dearie, I traveled a bed and bairn," sang the wife and put last minute bent pins into the loosening shawl. The crowd yelled louder, and the fair, that had come with its bright tents and dashing horses, dubbed every one of them a clown. She banked the fire, listened for a moment to the ringing bells and screaming blackbirds, and having collected her measure, beaver satchel and long scissors, she fluffed her hair once and went out to the landing and down the stairs. The black iron bust grew larger as the sun rose. She pushed the boy off the bottom step and joined the crowd. A processional of children marched by in the street, their faces painted black, calling, in their high sharp voices, the banns.

Too-la-la, too-la-la went the organ at the fair. A prize porker grunted behind mud-spattered beards and stared out at the passing feet with murderous red eyes. Walking with the furry satchel held in both hands, the collier's wife muttered, "Come now, don't you push me," "Well, you're a big fellar," "Now that's a sweet

bonnet for such a nice day." The old woman was carried along, past the post where they had hung the thieving man, past apples soaked in honey, and past the lane where couples walked arm in arm.

Henry was fitted for only one pair of trousers at the tailor's shop. He had been in the shop many times before with the parson and the parson's friends, but never to have his own clothes made. And now he found himself between the fitting and the finish, with a high price placed on his end. Giant silver shears lay gaping on the long counter. Through the broad dusty windows he could see the bobbing caps, the trailing skirts. An old woman with a big satchel hurrying by, and little boys with bundles of newspapers going in and out of the building across the street. He could feel the probing fingers of the head fitter, the dissatisfied white fingers with the long dangling tape measure. He concentrated on the window, tried not to move. An old gentleman sat asleep in a gilded chair, asleep with gout, fat with pain, his heavy arms hanging towards the floor. A few thin flies buzzed up near the ceiling. Young men in black aprons, hair parted in the middle, idled about the rear of the shop, laughing, smoked rolled cigarettes, started and stopped the sewing machines, and looked out of the rear window at row upon row of flapping sheets. Henry tried to withdraw from the wretched precise fingers, felt his mouth go dry. Over and over the tailor wrote on his little pad, a laugh from the black eyed men in the back. It was necessary to order the flowers. And since she didn't like that ring, he'd have to go after another. Spindle upon spindle of colorless cloth waited to unroll about majesty's back, or drape the forms in frozen biers. The fingers were insect's wings in the crotch of his trousers, hummingbird wings in the crotch of a young tree. He looked down upon the bald head of the kneeling tailor and then out into the street. It was cold and it was bright. He saw the old woman pass in front of the window again. He smelled the odor of fine clothes.

"A little bit tight, sir?"

"No, no, Alfred, that's all right."

The sun was suddenly blocked in the door. The general entered.

"Morning, Henry."

"Sir." Henry smiled.

"And are you doing well by my future son-in-law, Alfred? I trust nothing exorbitant."

"Oh, I'm doing well, sir, well indeed." Alfred, sitting on the floor, his thin knees resting against the little podium where Henry stood, grinned up at the reddening face.

"That's all right, Alfred," said Henry, "please just hurry up." The little tailor jumped to his feet. A piece of thumbnail chalk in hand, he scribbled hieroglyphics about the trouser seat.

"There you are, and a fine specimen it is." He beamed.

The general stood patiently by in his old khakis while groups of carolers passed the window leading fighting cocks on strings. The trousers and the morning coat cost Henry a great deal of money.

The general and Henry hurried along the street. "Have a flower, mister, have a flower for ya missus." It grew colder, Henry covered his pointed ears.

Suddenly he was startled by a grunting snort that protruded through the beards. He saw the red eyes and quickly looked into the crowd to see if the old woman was there—

"I suppose you'll meet your father now? Then I'll leave you," said the general.

—She was not.

The collier's wife entered Mr. Alfred Beetle's tailor-dry-goods shop. It was dark and a few candles were lit in waxen brackets on the wall. The beer was strong. Fat-necked men and women with baskets of eggs were rummaging through mounds of cloth. A young girl, her calves white in the candle light, was eating from a box of figs. Tables were piled high with patched jackets, wrinkled shoes, sow's ears and discarded feathers. A stuffed peacock stood by the head-fitter's chair. One glass eye surveyed the mob.

"One of my sister's young was an idiot, 'e plays with a spoon. Funny creature never says a word."

"Aye, Flo has a whole flock of 'em, lets 'em play in the yard. They say the doctor's hurtin' 'em is the cause of some."

A bell rang as the door opened and closed.

A smell of dust hung on the galatea. Petals fell from a pot of old flowers.

"Now, Mr. Beetle, I've come for you ta help me," said the collier's wife. Her fingers touched the rolls of satin.

"To be sure, anything I can do," he said. He eyed the old woman through thick glasses, stooped his shoulders a little more. He puffed on a short weed. His bald head shone. Canaries sang in the apartment overhead; one of the shoppers sneezed. Mr. Beetle quickly chewed a piece of matzo.

"We know you're the queen of the seamstresses," he said, "we'll try to be worthy of your trade." He smoothed one of the rolls that she had touched.

"This is a very important mission," she said, looking down at her chapped hands. "I been commissioned ta make the weddin' gown of a yun 'oman, daughter to a very prominent general."

"Ah, I see how it is. That what you're lookin' at is fine material," he said. His shell was covered with black and purple spots.

Carefully she turned the faded price-tag over. Her eye was caught by a flaming orange scarf. Her nostrils waited a moment as she smelled the Christmas smoke.

"Mr. Beetle, it's outrageous the price for a bit of cloth. Between you and me, who's old friends, I think we could make a slight agreement, seein' as my customer is such an important yun lady."

"Business ain't easy." His fingers stayed longer on the cloth. He hitched his trousers.

"I can't pay such a domm amount!" The old head bent down and looked into his.

"Then take *that* stuff," he cried, his hair on end.

The collier's wife turned to the new roll with a witchery look at the little man. The cloth was very cheap, thin, and covered with a glossy sheen.

"Now, at half the price of this, I might do some business wi' ya fer a few yards," as her eyes lit up.

Beetle bit his thin lip, pressed a finger against his nose.

"Aw right, dam woman, I'll give it ya for a quarter under, but no better."

Grinning, she walked from the Beetle's shop, the gaudy cloth beneath her arm, the extra coins in her apron pocket, and with the satchel bobbing. She mixed with the crowd on their way to the fair. She laughed at the bearded men with tarts and caps made from newspapers. She clicked across the street in her thin boots.

A young man, high silk hat cocked upon his head, played the organ and a fat child worked the bellows. Behind them, on a stand of planks, danced the girl. Her veils trailed above the boards around her thumping feet. Still, uplifted faces watched her move, while a bottle of stout was passed from mouth to mouth.

Hands on hips, bundles by her feet, the collier's wife surveyed the group of men pressed against the stage, the water-hole, staring at the lean calves. Faces were covered with soot; hard

thick thumbs were hooked into waistcoats. The smell of taffy, boiling over open fires, drifted across the stage. The collier's wife watched a figurative movement of the dancer's knee. "Ah, ya b'g men," she said, "go on home!" And gathering up her satin and bag, she made her way back to her rooms.

She heard the children's giddy screams as they watched the dancing bear at the fair.

Henry stood on the street corner, the carnation on his coat jiggling in the wind. He looked for the old woman among the passing, merry faces. The grey wind swept by his legs. He could still feel the fingers. Automobiles swerved and jammed, lights wavered on and off, and a heavy man, dressed in red, slowly shook a bell on the opposite corner. Henry tapped with his cane and started to cross the street.

The eyes of the mob were ringed in black. Bowler hats and caps, peaks and sticks, carrying split pumpkins, they pulled Henry along. They screeched and cawed, waved pennants of the fair. *Too-la-la* went the organ, *puff-puff* the little boy. "Now you're going to get it," said the young man in the black hat, and using his high-heeled foot he jabbed the struggling boy at the bellows. Henry was slowly wedged through the rind of men until, amid their silent breathing his body was pressed against the edge of the stage, and he stood by the collier. Moving un rhythmically from side to side, the dancer tapped her palms against her hips. Henry saw that the bottoms of her bare feet were black. Slowly those rising and falling black soles worked their way towards the front of the stage and closer and closer to Henry's eyes. The collier pressed forward, his knees and heavy hands blocked by the upright boards. His eyes moved to follow as she moved. The veils fluttered; round rough thighs were taut. The woman's hocks sank in the mud. Her eyes strained. The driver flicked her with a switch of brush. Her nostrils were red, the horns lowered. Henry heard the clanking of chains, the suck of hoofs covered with water. The haunches swayed, moved forward and stopped. She mooded.

And at that moment, the men began to cheer, clapped each other on the back, their heads motionless, throats opened. The deep bass clamor for more swung up over the woman's head. She breathed hard; the muscles went limp. Henry rested his forehead against the boards. The organ began, and again she danced, moving backwards. In a wild effort Henry looked around

and, for a moment, saw the old woman behind the men. Using his arms, his head, his chest and elbows, he pushed and squirmed, and free of the staring faces, he ran. The organ thumped; the dancer calmly retreated. In another step she reached the curtain. She disappeared.

The cheers broke out again.

13.

Slowly the pieces formed a pattern on the bust. The cellophane-satin doll, half-made faceless bride, waited upright, cold, for the hour to come. Twilight. A full moon was over the crooked chimneys, a silver plate over the highway. Low coals shone, burning brightly, on the collier's wife, a wrinkled red Indian beneath the eyes. Her head was full of springtime. The single coil of hair had come undone and, alive, the braid hung over her red shoulders. She sat on a threelegged stool watching the corner where in the shadows, in the aisle, stood the helpless, silent bust, peering back. Large sections of the gown were still unsewn and were held by bitter, glittering pins. The bust waited impatiently and the collier's wife watched with a wary eye. Neither spoke. But again the old woman commenced, heaved herself to life and grinning, poked the needle and snow-white thread in and out of the gown on the bust. "Emily, Emily, this is your own, a gown to be married in, made of stone." She worked quickly, as the room became filled with needle-eyes and arms and hands, filled with smoke. She towered above the dress and roughly pulled it and pinched.

Panda-like, a cat who had lost his whiskers and part of his tail, swung across the clothesline out of the window and dropped into the room. "Good evening, Mr. Cuddles," said the old woman. Stitch, stitch. The cat walked to a dish and began to drink. "Ya don't 'ave too much to say, do ya?" She bit a piece of thread, squinted at the light.

"How are ya doing tonight, 'ooman?"

"Healthful, Mr. Cuddles. But I've lots of work."

"It's a lame old sufferer you are."

"Mind your tongue, or you'll find yourself back outa the winda."

"That's all right, now, you'll hear from me later on tonight. I might do a bit of singin', ya know. There's poisonous people who comes to hear me sing."

"All right, drink up. But give me no foul play."

The scissors stuck upright in the table. The cat's eyes, the wife's eyes, and the bust's fell on them. The coals rustled. She eyed her handiwork. The cat scooped in the dish with his paw. Nothing. He sat down, dropping his hat on the floor. "Who's yer friend?" Yellow eyes peering into the corner, grinning. "Just don't bother me," answered the collier's wife. She scowled, looked darkly down at the tired cat, "It's none of *your* affair, whoever she be. Not a bit, I tell ya." She rubbed her damp chin. The bust in the satin gown moved with the breeze. The empty face turned more demurely into the blackness. The dagger flashed on the table. "Why don't she speak?" asked the cat. He pushed the grey dish away from his chair. The wife stood still, hearing the soft wind. She held the needle poised, the lips quivered. "If you don't stop yer whinin' questions . . ." The thread was whispered into the steam over the hearth, hung above the boiling percolator, was lost on slimy aluminum kettles. The cat's eyes were closed, his tie fell over his throat, two short black ribbons. A lorrie rolled by in the street below. The scissors cut quickly, the knife moved in and out, an arm appeared through the hole in the satin, a thin white arm. The wife's cold fingers smoothed the bodice where the flowers would be. The pale arm swayed to and fro, weak and alive. The shears and needles darted faster; blue shadows rose and fell from the rotting chairs. The hair on the cat's spine slowly bristled. The collier's wife left her sewing for a moment, swept across the room and stirred the simmering pot. An acid smell of herbs filled the room. The ruffled cape, perched above the wedding gown, shifted back and forth. The old woman stirred the pot and eyed the slender figure across the room. The hard coral fingers began to tremble; the dozing cat moaned to himself. A bug crept out of his fiery lair, stared for a moment and scurried across the floor. The wife chased him with her stamping foot, monstrous beastie, and rested, panting, against the bare wall. She heard the breathing of the bust, pulled the red shawl tighter about her shoulders. She began to work. "C'mon," mumbled the cat in his sleep, "give us a kiss."

He awoke with a start, slowly flicked his tail. He saw the old woman bending over the body in the corner, saw the unfinished, fluttering, wedding gown. A green light filled the room with the depth of the sea. The old woman hovered silently at work, her shift through the loosening shawl. He heard the scuffling of her slippers. With a grunt he heaved himself from the little chair and walked across the room on his hind feet. Reaching the cupboard, he climbed and the room, the rags, the eyes,

began to swirl. He held his breath, his claws dug deeper. Almost to the top, almost to the jug of wine. He sucked the breath into his purring chest, extended his left paw over the right, was conscious of the bride's white arms. Then the scissors smashed passed him, the windmill dagger blades whirling the air, and hit the pyramid of cans over his head. Amid the vicious outraged yells of the wife, he and the cans fell clattering and screaming to the floor. In a single leap the old woman scattered bundles of rags and buttons into the air; a table hit the wall and collapsed. The cat bolted to the door. Locked. He looked up in horror at the descending maenadic wife. The door flew open and at that moment he felt the impact of the iron foot; his mouth still open and eyes glazed, he careened down the stairs. The door slammed. Cans rolled on the floor.

The collier's wife leaned against the door, her ear pressed to the panel, her hands at her throat and she heard the heavy pounding of her heart. Then the anger twisted her eyes again. "Twist," she screamed, and ran to the window. Up and down the street, no one there. No cat. Everyone was at the fair. Nothing moved. "Nubbins," she cried, "Nubbins, come back here." The blue street was still. A shadow moved under the lamp post, then was gone. She leaned her head out into the cool evening, leaned on her heavy arms and the cool air brushed past her face. Slowly she felt the throbbing pain in her finger. Up to the light she saw the spot of blood, the needle's point, and she felt the pain. She looked in disbelief, her face became white and stealthily she turned her back to the window. She peered into the corner. The bust, white-robed and slender, moved. The breeze touched the back of her neck. She shivered. Holding the long pearl-headed hat pin, the collier's wife crept towards the bust, her eyes never leaving her prey. She inched forward. Then she leapt. The pin plunged in and out of the abdomen, quicker and quicker, in and out above the thighs. Small drops of blood appeared on the satin. Her breathing was strong.

Outside the cat returned, cried under the window once, then limped away.

The dress was finished.

"I do wisht 'ed come 'ome instead o' leavin' me 'ere alone like this," thought the collier's wife as she stirred the soup.

At precisely the proper moment Beady knocked on the parson's door. Everything was timed by the little silver watch that

hung from her breast. Old cassocks were tossed about the room, black beneath dust. A white collar sat in the middle of the rug.

"How many are expected at the ceremony?" asked the parson. He stood in his shirtsleeves behind the marble desk, prayer book in hand.

"Five hundred, I believe, dearest."

The parson grunted. He never appeared before a group of less than three hundred. All of his choir boys had his initials stitched on the collars of their gowns.

The room was dark, most of the light shut out by thick window-bars that protected the ground floor room from vandals. And since the parson didn't think the bars enough, heavy iron-mesh gratings had been added to the bars. A picture of the Christ Child was on the desk, one of Beady was in the drawer, face down. The parson walked up and down behind the desk in short footsteps. His fingernails were polished white, his forehead straight, and his hair black and sleek. "Dearly beloved," he intoned, stopped, continued his walk. His voice was smooth and rich like the imported bells that rang somewhere high above in the grey air. The room was warm. "Please shut the door," said the parson. The lights that burned around the dressing table mirror were dim and yellow. The grease paint in pots was sticky from the heat, the crumpled pieces of tissue and cotton warm and used. Beady stooped by the oil heater, shielded her face, and turned the knob. The flame went out with a pop. She jumped back.

Small and aloof, she again stood by the desk, humming, waiting. "Dearly beloved," he said again. "Well, how does it sound?" Before she could answer, he said, "never quite right. Not quite." She spoke, "Henry will arrive soon." "I perform so many of these ceremonies. I feel as if I'm participating in world union. As if I add something to their happiness, the bliss of young couples. You might help me with this." She stepped to his side. For a moment his head, shoulders, and waist were a fumbling black mass. Beady pinched and pulled until his flushed face appeared. At the mirror he combed his hair over again. She caught specks of hair and lint from the gown. Pigeons fluttered high over the steeple, beat their wings against the parson's barred windows; they could not reach the ledges to roost or walk. Beady admired his fine figure. He plucked some of the lint from the gown himself and smoothed it around the collar.

Out in the kitchen the cook wept. The cake was covered with frosty curlycues. She looked at it, wept again. The little man in black at the frosting altar had no face.

Passersby walked with their heads down.

A short boy reached up to light the candles. His stiff collar rubbed.

The organist practiced his scales.

A few scattered people sat in reserved pews. They whispered back and forth, nodding and smiling. The faces were pale blue in the dim light.

A mother fumbled underneath the dress of a flower-girl, the little girl talked incessantly. A pigeon walked up and down in front of the high doors, hopping quickly as feet approached.

Two white ribbons extended up the aisle. Adults stepped over, children crawled under, and they laughed or stared but none untied the knots. Flowers hung from the ribbons.

The parson looked once more in the mirror, fluffed out the creases in the gown, studied his reflection. "You'll be sure to prompt me?" he queried. "Of course," she quickly answered, "of course." Abruptly he turned to the desk and slid some scraps of paper into the prayer book. He always inserted fragments of a sermon into the service and made special announcements.

Outside the door her watch showed ten minutes had elapsed. Soon it would be over. She started upstairs to dress, dabbing at her eyes with a handkerchief. The organist went up and down the keyboard.

The collier's wife carried the rolled-up wedding gown beneath the shawl, next to her shift. Through the rips and holes it touched her skin and the small bodice rubbed against goose flesh. She walked quickly and held her bandaged finger up to the wind. A thin dried line of blood traveled down her wrist and crossed the burn. Her eyes watered. "Wretched, wretched cat. I'd a' broke is back with me own foot if I'd only thought." She passed a dark doorway. "Keep away, I want no truck with ya, old cross-eyed devil." She shifted the gown against her breast with her uninjured hand. The gown wrinkled. She walked faster, hobnails clattering on the stones, her finger throbbing. A one-legged crane was black against the sky, perched in his nest on a chimney top. Tears started from the old woman's eyes and slipped down the yellow cheeks; she caught them with her tongue.

The crooked street became gradually more narrow until it was only an alley between high, unbroken walls. Chickens hunted around the bottoms of rain barrels, padded feet knocked against tin cans and darkness drifted out of barred cellar windows. The collier's wife climbed over an orange crate, her feet crunch-

ed in broken glass. "Fool," she said. Her foot sloshed through a puddle of water; she dodged a loose dangling iron wire. She ran along a slippery plank like an old fat mouse, peering into the darkness. She stopped, listened, ears twitching as she heard dull unrhythmic footsteps on the other side of the wall. Water dripping from her matted coat left an uneven trail on the plank and she stumbled beneath stone arches and overheads, passed cavernous sewers and tasted the damp, rotted bricks and concrete dust. Her white fangs glittered, the hobnails caught a mouldy gunny sack. She smelled the lime and rusting wainscots. "If I catch ya," she mumbled, "I'll cut the curling hide right from yer bones." A can rattled. "Poke at yer eyes," pebbles rattling on the iron roofs, "cut yer mouth right off," she shook her finger, "boil yer carcass," and breathing quicker she rubbed her chest through the wedding gown. Her face became wizened and blanched and when she lost a tooth she stopped to search for it. "God beat me, if ever such luck. . ." Then she ran on, feeling for it with her tongue.

The alley narrowed until it was a tunnel through shingles, plaster, corrugated walls, barred wooden doors, gables, endless pipes, and overhanging beams studded with crooked nails. Angular rough corners caught her unawares and tore at the shawl. With wooden shavings clinging to her socks, she made her way through stonehenge. From the other end of the tunnel, the dull half-pitched note of a bell swung towards her and drifted past. A dog staggered across her path and growled from one hole to another. And as the sharp steam from a whistle on the other side of town shot up into the evening, she reached the house. A chill came out of the clay. The house was in a crevice of windowless brick walls, squat and black beneath the rising tile roofs and blackening sky. A blue marble birdbath was tilted against the stoop, and bundles of grey weeds coiled about its base. The empty windows of the house were streaked with candle wax; smoke poured from the chimney.

She coughed, abominable e'enings, into a rag and clumped up the steps. She pulled the chain and waited, sitting in front of the door on the wet steps. Unfastening the shawl, she withdrew the wedding gown and shook it over her knees in the wind. She dropped it on the steps beside her. She waited.

"What do *you* want?"

Gathering up the dress she turned and looked at the high voice in the doorway. "Well?" said the generaless's chamber boy. His purple livery was stained with spots of jam and his

sleek black puttees were covered with dust. The hair stood up in a cowlick in the back, his hands were in his pockets. There were faded gold stripes down the trousers. A pencil was stuck cross-wise between his teeth, like a bit, to perfect his pronunciation.

"Don't know I want nuthin' from you," she said. He looked placidly into her red eyes, looked up and down. Past him in the cold light, the old woman could see frail gilded chairs and many-colored campaign flags stacked against the walls.

"There aren't any handouts . . ." he grinned, his mouth a loose red bow.

Her scar turned a chalk-white, knees knocked. "I'm here to deliver this weddin' gown." She shook it in his face. The pretty red mouth drew away, the cowlick went higher and he wiped his cheek with a soft cloth. He took a small apple from his pocket, tossed it, caught it, and held it up to his eye. Emily sat alone in her bare room and listened to the voices at the door.

"Well, deliver it and be off." He looked at the apple.

The old woman dropped the dress at his feet. She stepped from the porch, and turning, yelled, "Ya fresh yun' screw!" She went back into the alley. With a quick movement, he retrieved the dress, went into the house, and shut the door. Emily heard the far-off voices of the carolers and began to weep. Taking the pencil from his mouth, the boy took a bite of the apple. It began to snow, small flakes that were like raindrops.

As she stumbled through the alley and the snow wet her shoulders, the old woman thought of the fair and the dancing girl. "The idee," she thought, "him leavin' me all alone to face them insults." And suddenly she knew where to find the collier.

The chamber boy hung the wedding dress on Emily's door knob. Carefully, in secret, she retrieved the gown and laid it on the bed.

In the middle of the procession, the flower girl's shoe came undone. While her mother left her pew and stooped to tie it, the organist repeated two notes over and over again. Snow banked against the windows and people coughed, while the pigeon left the steps and walked up and down inside the vestibule. Chauffeurs talked outside and beat their arms; a few went in to watch.

Wind blew through the cold chancellery and the candles jumped. The flowers were numb, ears red.

"Gore, 'ow long dese tings last," said a driver near the doors. He put his collar up and watched the long white line and shivering girl move up the aisle. They blew on their cold fingers. The

old women buried their faces in black muffs, tight white curls on wigs of ice.

"*Maledicat illum sancta Dei genetrix et perpetua Virgo Maria*" prompted Beady in a sharp whisper. Her head strained forward, hands cupped about the mouth. Words droned on and on and snow lit the windows with the sound of spattering sand.

The driver in the back began to stamp his feet.

A few carefully calculated handfuls of rice were thrown—but fell short.

The collier's wife kicked at the thick ankles and jabbed her fists into blunted ribs: "Outa my way, feller, outa th' way." She worked towards the tough, coal-dust covered collier. The dancing girl stayed almost motionless on the edge of the stage in front of the men, just to be seen, dancing as little as possible. The white flesh that Henry had gazed upon barely quivered. The face was rigid, dumb, a ring through the nose. The collier's mouth was open, the grey collar of his shirt open, his heart thumping steadily.

When she reached him she sank her iron fingers deep into the muscle of his wooden arm. She tugged at it.

"Ya ought ta be ashamed," she said. "A grown married mun standin' 'ere in the cold ta feast 'is eyes on that bare 'ooman, leavin' 'is wife ta 'ome." He looked steadily at the girl, raised his chin as she came closer.

"Ashamed! Me 'avin' terribul fights wit that vulgar inquisitif mun and a 'orrible, insultin' boy. Cum wi' me now, and get yer eyes from off them sinful legs." The men strained closer to see, the snow was white on the top of their caps, fell on the wife's uncovered head. The girl shivered. The wife tugged harder on his arm, the fingers closed.

Sudden'y he turned, "Awe, gawd a'mighty, I dun't know wat yer peevin' about..."

She led him home through the wet snow.

RHYTHM

14.

Henry shook the snow out of his eyes, swept past the violet chauffeurs and into the house. The monstrous pale reflection was a glandular bell-jar above the revelers, reflecting white light

from towels, tiles, and bones to their white heads. Hiding his head under his arm, Henry put the geranium into his mouth and with a quick swooping movement struck the match on the wall, watched the flame for a moment and inhaled deeply. He was dizzy. Emily laughed, twisted the paper flowers in her hair and pulled at the elastic in her frilled pantaloons. She waved, her mouth full of pins; he acknowledged the wave with dumb-sign over the crowd, hitting his cheek with his fist, touching his ears and nose and throat with his long fingers, tapping his elbows against his knees. Emily left the room.

Upstairs she looked for a long while into the empty bassinette, a basket propped between two chairs, covered with a handkerchief and filled with cotton. Midnight crept continuously up from the apple country and leaned against the window. Emily sat on a stool peering at the wads of cotton, looked at the glittering axe in the waiting pap and sniffed an unopened powder box. She had already had the new small shoes cast in bronze as keepsakes for the mantelpiece. Quickly she put on the little blue bonnet and the tassels hung down to her ears. "Now you must be a good boy," she said, "and love mother. Grow up to be a fine handsome man." Her gaze, wriggling in the bassinette, became afraid and very slowly, the white transparent face began to cry. Long bristling sideburns grew down the cheeks. The gaze, small, old and parched, answered her, helpless on its back. "You must never do a thing without consulting me, you must always come and see that I am well and not crying." Her heart, the size of an egg, began to tap, and slowly turning over, stuck under her tongue. "You better give me another kiss, you better give me another kiss, you better give me another kiss!" The gaze in the bassinette held out its hands. Emily stared at the fat fingers. "You better know how," the little blue face coughed, choked, "to take care of me." It gasped. "You better know what to do." It laughed and choked again. Midnight covered more and more of the window, slowly lifted the silver shawl from her bare knees. There was only one bead on the counting board, one red bead and she pushed it back and forth. "The first, a little round first, first, first." She looked into the open dripping mouth. It was like a bird's. Its high whistle pierced louder and louder in her ears. The fingers worked rapidly and aimlessly towards her face. A giant silver pin popped open in the oblong pouch with a twang of sprung steel. She hopped to her feet. The eyes were as white as the cotton wads, rolled upwards to the beginning nose. The sideburns withered and died. The frail peeping voice grew more

excited, the toes curled. She heard the low, persistent, burning rattle. Midnight fled, leaving the bassinette bare and cool. Carefully Emily picked up the miniature comb and brush and little silver mug and one by one flung them into the bassinette. Tap, tap went her heart. She reached the door and heard the startled gasps of anger. "You better give me another kiss!"

She slammed the door and tore the baby cap from her head. She listened, short and fat in her blue jumper, her bare feet touching cold smooth boards and the violent ribbons in her hair spinning tightly in a color-wheel. Kiss, kiss, kiss.

The roses are frozen like frozen huddled pigeons. The feathers and petals are smooth and round, shine dully covered with frost. Only their heads move, bending gradually in the chilled air, eyes moving, startled short movement. Mother's hands are hard and cold. The pigeons watch. The red brick house and house with the slanting roof are very big; the tree is bare and the swing hangs straight. The woman is at the other end of the street and as she nears, her black hat hangs down to her shoulders. Closer as falling temperature, the blood pressure from its high peak quickly falls, and a gathering grey cloud of cotton descends. As the woman passes, her hip brushes the child's eye.

On tiptoe Emily went back into the room and powdered her throat.

Dr. Smith tugged at the long cord tied around his stomach as a belt. He felt the rope slowly choking him in half, looked at the loose ends hanging below his knees. The knot held. The ungracious daughter perched on the back of a chair and shielded her face with both hands. The ivory necklace about her neck flicked its tail and collected itself to squeeze. A knot of men encircled them, golden nooses hanging from their vests. Henry brushed the melting snow from his shoulders as the necklace twitched on her breast, and the white chandelier hanging from the ceiling swayed to and fro, its feet lifeless and still. Long sharp wires ran under the rug and through the wall; the window cords were weighted with lead. The doctor played with the string dangling from his monocle. Henry fingered his tight collar. Gaylor Basisini undid his shirt.

"Time," said Dr. Smith, "is a nutcracker. Get what I mean? A nutcracker." The ungracious daughter trembled and the little pekinese, whose basket Emily had upstairs, sneezed fitfully in the corner. Joe Ottoe, who had pushed himself into the group, swirled the ice in his drink. His eyebrows arched.

"You're a *bull-a'tist*, Doc. M'own term. A *bull-a'tist*." A long twisting thread hung from his coat sleeve. He tried to brush it away.

"Be that as it may. O. K. Joe, but you're the typical man who feels the rough cracking jaws of time, and right where it hurts most." He adjusted the glass in his eye. "A man who's always on the bicycle-bar."

"Yeah," Joe grinned, "I guess I know what you mean. Pritty sma't." His eye circled the huddle of men.

"You do know, on a certain level, Joe. Below the belt. But after she squeezes for a long time, there's nothing left." The doctor threaded a long tough suture into the needle, focused on his head the reflector that shone like a locomotive searchlight. Joe pulled at the thread. Dr. Smith looked for a moment at the tendons in the daughter's long legs.

"Man tries . . ."

"Man plays . . ."

"At first with himself . . ."

"Finally grows . . ."

"He's sm'at, he knows . . ."

"Then he dies," said Henry. The heads turned to look at him.

The doctor burst out laughing and took a drink from Joe's glass. "It's a nutcracker, boys." With two fingers, Henry plucked at his damp shirt. His necktie grew tighter.

"Everybody wants to kiss, kiss, kiss," said Dr. Smith. The ungracious daughter looked up, eyes starting from her head.

"Hell, we all gotta have our fling," said Joe.

His wife sat on the floor in the bathroom, her stockings rolled, her hair undone, smoke curling from her nostrils.

"It's a wonderful pa'ty, Beady," she said. "You don't mind if I call ya Beady?" Beady fumbled. A long wire from a little dim lamp caught around her foot. "Not at all." Quickly she rinsed her mouth with cool water. "Ya know," said the woman on the floor, "Joe's gettin' kinder hard to hold." She took another drag, wiped her eye. "You better know," said Beady, "what to do. You better know what to do."

"Yeah."

"Excuse me a minute, boys," said Dr. Smith. He turned away, leaned over. "You better give me another kiss," he said. The head turned sharply. Henry's finger stuck between his collar and throat. The music of a harp and its long vibrating strings filled the room, plucked strings and struck strings, wires and chords, tinkled together. "Hey, who's got de ear?" said Joe. The

windows softly rattled with the music, a kiss in the dark, a good tune, floated along the ceilings. Noel grew fatter and fatter under the piano, beer cans piled around his feet. His ears pricked up when he heard light tripping footsteps out in the hall, footsteps coming down the rope ladder.

Emily walked carefully down the stairs, holding the baby as far from her as she could. "Now, remember," it said, "I don't want anyone to see me." Emily turned her nose from the dripping form. Joe Ottoe's wife, who had come out to find a towel, met her at the bottom of the rope. "Hi, Emily! You don't mind if I call ya Em'ly?" "Not at all." Quickly she put the baby in her pocket and, skirt split up the side, she danced into the bright room.

The adventuress in green had lost her green and with her hands under her head she lay like marble along one wall, cigarette holder clenched between her teeth. The harp strings ran through her hair. Yawning, the monster from South America sat by her side, painting his nails. His shoe laces were knotted and hung over the sides of his yellow shoes, floated in the tepid water like strangling water-moccasins. The cigarette holder bobbed up and down, empty, and as she drew pictures on the wall with the black end of the butt, she was dimly conscious of the voices.

Dr. Smith had the ungracious daughter perched on his knee. It answered "yes" to everything he said.

"I once had a girl about your age," he said. "She was riding down the street on a bicycle one day and got tangled up with a wire from a smashed telephone pole. After the sparks stopped flying, she was as black as an Indian mummy."

"Gee, that's tough, Doc."

"Yes," said the girl.

His slender fingers ran over the mummy's knee.

"Boys," said Dr. Smith, and looked up at them, "have you ever looked at a blonde head like this, an ever thought what was inside it?" He nodded at the head. She blinked.

"It's something for an old man to think about," he said. "I just hope to hell she doesn't see what's in mine," he added. "She's time's little helper," he laughed and dropped her on the floor. The circle of eyes looked coldly on. She began to pick up the string of broken beads, picked one like magic from the doctor's cuff. He took off his coat and shirt and turned around.

"See this back?" he said. "It's still a strong one." They all laughed. A long scar with a noose at the end of it ran down the thin white flesh. "It'll make 'em or break me," he said. Henry watched the jiggling noose.

No one saw Emily dance.

First she whirled to the right, then to the left, and stopped. She flew around and around, elbows bent over her head, hopping on one foot after the other.

"It never seems to lose its charm," said Dr. Smith. He smoothed his rubber gloves, cracked a piece of ice between his teeth. "All starts with a baby's little pink. . ."

"Awe, Doc, that's gettin' pretty raw," said Joe.

"Joe," the doctor said, "when you've seen as many of those things, both on the old and on the young, as I have, you won't worry about whether they're raw or cooked. And you'll find out they're all cooked anyway." He reached down and slapped the thin white haunch. One by one she dropped the beads into her mouth.

"Bull," said Joe.

Emily was conscious of the eyeless faces and laughing gayly, she spun around once more and sat down amid waves of applause, her tail wagging.

"It's all glan's," said Joe, "all glan's."

The white walls were covered with long black lines, finger marks, telephone numbers and little drawings, games of tic-tac-toe, in pencil or ink, and filthy words, left by people who were waiting for the telephone or piano, or radio. Emily's mouth hung open, she gasped for breath, breathing through a handkerchief to escape the germs.

Upstairs in the master suite the generaless opened her mouth and swallowed a black pill. The general pounded her shoulder blades, as she coughed, and when he stopped, his orderly took his place.

"Oh, God," she gasped, "get this animal off me, Soris."

"Yes, my dear. Stand off," he cried, and the orderly shrunk back.

The parson, his chin on his cane, glared at them all. "More hot milk?" he asked. He was in charge of the round gold samovar from which spurted the steaming colorless milk.

"I might have some for the cat," ordered the generaless. It still clung to her bosom.

"Here, use my cup," said the general. It squirmed.

"You better give me a kiss," said the generaless and, its tongue still wet with milk, it licked her cheek.

Beady came fumbling into the room, her eyes not used to the dark, her hands wet. The orderly tried to push her out again, quickly, with a single heaving motion. "It's me," she cried, "it's only me. I want to stay."

"Stand off," shouted the general.

"Milk," said Beady, "how nice. I smell it."

"Well, you can't be underfoot," said the orderly, and pulling a ball of twine from his pocket, he tied her to the foot of the bed. The long sharp cord bit into her ankle and she heard the breathing of the samovar that rumbled like an anesthizer. The parson clapped the mask over his nose. Drinking from the cat's cup. She spilled the milk down the front of her dress and felt it seeping through the silk. "Don't you think," she said, "we should do something about Emily?"

The parson sank into the ether. "I think they can tell when it's expected. Right down to the size, I think."

"You might let *me* handle this," said the generaless, "I know what to do." The orderly, feeling his way, helped her, trembling, to a chair. She dabbed at the scratches from the cat's claws. Beady's yellow eyes blinked in the dark. The parson's cane hit the spigot as he dreamed, and the milk poured out into the darkness and onto the rug in an endless stream.

"Damn," said the general and pushed the orderly away from his side.

"My goodness," said Lady Wheeling-Rice to Noel's advances, "I haven't done it in years." She peered over the top of an enormous fan.

Henry looked up at the single white bulb that blazed down from the chandelier. The cord from which it hung was a straight black rope behind the brilliant light, that swung like a paralytic metronome. He tried to remember something about a seacoast town but could not. He felt the milk seeping through his shirt. His eyes converged on the unshaded light, the bell-jar breathed in muscular undulations, the parson slept. Ether arose from the bassinette.

Emily knew that the baby had been shaken up by her dancing and sitting on the edge of the sofa, she waited for it to emerge into full view. She kicked off her shoes.

The arm swung back and forth across Henry's face as Dr. Smith talked and gestured to the ungracious daughter.

"Well," said the doctor, "now you know how it all works. Your mother should have told you long ago, but now you know the whole story."

Henry was sorry he had missed what the doctor said.

Dr. Smith closed the medical handbook.

"Pulse, a hundred and twelve. Let me have that sponge," commanded the doctor. The samovar gurgled.

He wiped his rubber hand over his forehead. She opened the fat plaid purse, dropped in the rest of the beads and produced the sponge. He pounded it with a mallet until it was flat and soft and shapeless on the butcher's block and quickly he crammed it into the wound. "It hurt a little, didn't it?" he said. The sponge puffed out to its normal shape. She said nothing. He showed her the extracted splinter.

"Nutcracker, nurse," said the ungracious daughter, in her turn, and holding the ether can under his nose she went to work.

"You're a funny kid," said Dr. Smith through the enveloping fumes.

She hacked furiously.

Pain shot up his spine and bright and sharp as the light overhead, Henry felt it strike behind his ears. The masked nodding heads and muffled words, the steel chandelier and gurgling pekinese, spools of gut and pounding bull, all rushed upon him to melt away each vertebra. He tried to pull the fingers from his arms, to tear the hands from his throat. But he could not remember. The bodies of the guests were made of glass and every time he tried to look at them they wrapped themselves in great black slickers so he couldn't see. He was eaten by the blinding pain and searing light and was consumed with curiosity. He felt layers of cracked ice packed about his spine.

"God, it's cold in here," said Dr. Smith and tore the sweater from the girl's back. The seams split open over his pointed shoulder blades.

Henry shivered. Out in the garage the chauffeur worked by candlelight jacking the middycar up, pumping grease into the nipples. Henry heard the steel hammer-head beating the diaphragm, striking the warped fire-wall, and felt the pain of gas on his stomach.

Emily touched her landscaped abdomen, felt the twisting scars like a rough starfish. Every few years she liked to have an operation, be careful, please, and the starfish grew larger and larger with fat stitched tentacles. She felt it move. At any moment she expected Dr. Smith to say, "A boy. Nine pounds five ounces. Nice work." She waited fidgeting with her toes.

"You're quite a little girl," the doctor said. The ungracious daughter didn't answer but leaned her back against his knees, trying to keep warm.

Emily frowned.

The chauffeur scratched his ear and looked at the large black body and jumbled tubes. It was dark.

The generaless's voice rang out in the darkness. "We'll take her in for an inspection tomorrow. I'm sure Emily will feel better when things are more certain." The parson muttered in his sleep; Beady bit through the cord with her teeth and started downstairs for some more milk. "That's a wise decision," she whispered.

Her white dress was unsoiled, the bows on her braids immaculate and as she walked she twisted the rings on her fingers. Wings of marquissette trailed behind her in the suspended dust and the hem of her dress barely swept the balustrade. The smell of hemlock fell from her evening hair as she circled downwards over the stairs of glass, a rosary falling almost to her feet. Below her swirled the river and she heard the children laugh as they parted the waves. She heard the feathers of a bird stirred in its slumber and shadows followed her in the marble wall. A veil covered half her face and bosom and a little crown was on her head. A lamp-ighter lit each wick as she approached. She took two steps forward and one back, two forward and one back, gamely and triumphantly, the children laughing, until she finally reached the bottom, the steel milkcan tilting her to one side.

Henry jumped when Beady, dear mother, touched his arm and dropped the milkcan at his feet.

15.

"Wait," he said, "don't do that." Calmly he took the handkerchief from Beady's hand so she wouldn't wipe the cold tears from the corner of her eye. He stuffed the handkerchief into his pocket.

"Henry," she said, "would you go fill the milk pitcher for me? That's a good boy." He stooped to pick up the heavy can. Beady saw that his eyes were filled with little black crooked lines of sleeplessness. She frowned.

"Certainly, Mother," he said. As he stooped he peered closer into her eyes for a moment to see if he could find one small red flower. He could not. She drew away from him and frowned again. A bead of perspiration dropped in a long cold thread down his leg and twined in rivulets around his garter. He heard a glass fall and smash on the floor and the pieces showered in flashes of artificial color in the boudoir, on the tiles, across the dining-room

table. He started toward the kitchen and heard the solitary crunching of his shoes.

"Hurry up, dear," she called after him and sat down beside Emily.

"Now I'm going to tell you all a story," said Dr. Smith.

Henry dragged his shoulder along the wall as he slid down the hallway and his padded jacket left a lengthening smear in the white dust. His fingers and shoulder dragged as use'less paws through the dust, the steel milk can swung between his legs, striking first one knee then the other with a hollow painful sound.

"It all began," said Dr. Smith, "like this . . ." He coughed, his chunky red face shaking from side to side and the venom shot from his incongruously small mouth.

Henry tried to reach the kitchen, but the note said one and it wasn't one at all. The guests would be waiting, he should make the pie. He coughed.

"A pretty girl," said Smith, "came into the office and said, 'Doc, I'm going to have a baby. But I don't want it.' She was a cute little thing with a plain white face and a little black hat cocked on one side of her head. I had a hard time seeing her over the bundle of groceries she put on the desk, but you could see she was cute . . ." He chewed quickly on the end of his cigarette. Emily leaned forward to listen.

"You better get some sleep, dear. We have a big day tomorrow," said Beady. But Emily stared at Dr. Smith and dimly felt the squirming new being beneath her fingers. Already the generaless held the field telephone close to her face in the bedroom and, polishing each brass button down her tunic with a scrap of handkerchief, she spoke; "Have the middycar by the side door just before dawn. Be prepared for a long drive." The chauffeur in the barn saluted at the mouthpiece and heard the machine click off. The generaless, her head on her fist, stared cold y into space.

"I felt sorry for this girl, understand," he said. Smith looked around at his audience. "But it's not my job to feel sorry. There just wasn't anything I could do." Emily looked down into her lap. "I had my nurse give her a drink and then we sent her over to a classmate of mine who hadn't made the grade. Give him a hatchet and he was happy." Dr. Smith's eye was caught by some leaves, pieces of cloth, silver buttons and a rusty dagger pinned to the white wall. "Say, what's all this?" he asked. Emily wanted to say that they were Daddy's campaign collection, brought from many foreign fields in a carefully locked steel trunk, but

she could not speak. The words were vapid circles that labored hollowly up through her dry throat. They rang emptily against the roof of her brain and vibrated over and over around her eyes and ears, as if she had actually spoken, with the monotony of sleep. "Well," said the doctor, "that's the way they get stung, stuck and undeceived. They loose it, drop it, throw it away before it's big enough to name or be a bastard in the family circle." He laughed. "Sometimes, though," he laughed again, "it's all a mistake, a dream and there isn't any roe at all; and they end up just as dry as ever."

The monster from South America and the adventuress hung together and waltzed about the room, her eyes closed, his trousers rolled to the knees. His garters hung down like little sets of suspenders and red and yellow they bulged over the shoulders of his block-like calves.

Beady dozed.

Henry reached the middle of the room and knew he was finally near, dear Sister Ann, the kitchen. The French doors, ajar at the far end of the dining-room, swung to and fro into the blackness over the terrace outside, and every time the moon struck them through the trees, their many little stained-glass panes shot up in blurred and jumbled light. Over and over he rubbed his fists into his eyes, but each time he looked he caught a glimpse of Gaylor Basistini, hanging just beyond the swinging doors, a monstrous knot jambed partway through his broken neck, his feet almost resting on the flagstones of the terrace. The mirror beyond the doors flashed on and off broken by showers of color from the panes and the sound of leaves scraping over the stones. Henry thrust his mother's cambric handkerchief into his mouth and clenched his jaws. Over and over he saw the hanging body of his friend, saw the black taut rope. Gulls toppled over about his feet and still he watched, dry taste of dust and perfume in his mouth, white light shimmering on the walls. The black body moved, struck a match and flicked it into a potted shrub. The head, mouth open, tongue hanging out, turned and glanced through the open doors. "C'mon out, Henry," Gaylor said, puffing on the cigarette. Henry tugged at his necktie, felt the sand in his stockings. "I can't," he mumbled, "have to go on an errand for mother." His words came angry and trembling through his handkerchief. Crawling with the legs of a centipede he struggled forward and dragged the can over the last few Persian feet and reached the narrow coral arch of the kitchen door. "Ah, now, dear," said some old woman who was sitting at the

littered table, "have some tea." Then she was gone. Leaving the can in the center of the clear bone floor, he tried to find the handle of the refrigerator door. He reached farther with his fingers, trying to get the milk, the cool green earthen jar of milk. He clutched, tried to speak and as the party filled his head and he sank back on his knees in the brilliant, white, empty sleep, he heard a voice calling, "Goodnight, Henry, goodnight, goodnight. . ."

16.

The middycar roared through space. A long dark stream of soot and cinders settled in its wake and its high black wooden body swayed from side to side. Middyhead, the chauffeur, dressed in faded purple livery and wearing a wrinkled white cap, clutched the stocky steering-wheel and whistled through his teeth. The three old ladies, veils down and bearskin across their knees, sat in the back seat, heads barely high enough to see through the flashing windows. Each wore a black bandana across her mouth and nose, beneath the veil, against the dust and wind and as they rode in silence they kept their eyes on the back of Middyhead's neck. The noise from the great engine pounded in their ears along with the clattering of a bell which Middyhead pounded each time he shifted gears. They sat in silence, small pointed shoes resting on the straw-covered floor boards which jiggled and lurched above the gravel road. Ahead of the flying car the sky was dark and grey, and sheets of cold morning air cut past the sides of the sleek machine. Emily, in the middle, felt gusts of cold air climbing up her back, bent her head to escape the wind that swept through the cracks in the celluloid windshield. She wanted to scratch her nose beneath the veil, but each of her wrists was pinioned at her side by firm unrelaxing fingers. The blindfold pressed into her eyes and the little ribbons in her hair were squashed down under the black hat. Beady, to her left, was softly weeping, the tears draining onto her high starched collar. The generaless, on the right, called instructions through the microphone, her sharp head thrust forward.

"Take this turn, Middyhead. More acceleration, man. Watch that dog!"

The car swerved, the dog leapt from beneath the frail wheels of the middycar and scurried, yelping, to the side of the road. Wheeling, the generaless watched through her field glasses and saw him running off over the hills. The car accelerated, on and on. When they stopped for fuel the generaless pulled down all

the little black shades and even when they were in the open country, she never ceased her vigilance. Emily was stiff and cried in horror when she was bounced up and down on the springless seat and to the right and left as they bounded along, throttle wide. Fumes from the smoking engine filled the cab, the horn rang out, long and low. Dew-covered hedges and twisted trees flew by. Rotting fence rails lined the road; deep ruts and puddles were filled with cracking ice and sand that was flung up behind the whirling wheels. They crossed dry river beds, lurched through gullies, or sped over narrow wooden single-laned bridges, the wheels skidding on narrow-gauge rusty trolley tracks. A thin mist hung above the dump yard for a brief moment; an abandoned moss-covered mill shot by. Grey and black guinea hens struggled from the way of the onrushing car. Middyhead pulled the whistle cord and a long scream floated over the desolate country and across charred acres of burned-out forest land. Far ahead, against the cold pink horizon, they saw the black finger of a smoke stack and a thin line of heavy smoke that drifted against the shingled, frost-covered roofs. Middyhead swung the bow of the car dead against the far away stack and pulled on the tin vibrating throttle with his white gloved fingers. Emily felt herself thrown backward and felt the fingers hold tighter to her wrists. When the sun had swollen to a dirty red behind the smoke stack, Middyhead flicked the switch that cut off the piercing searchlight, adjusted his frog-like goggles and crouched forward. With a violent effort the middycar left the ground. They hung above the deep black gorge streaked with dirty swabs of snow and thumped across the railway trestle, the wheels banging on the ties. Frost-covered clumps of weeds grew from the crooked rusted elbows of the spindley girders and the steel wheels of the middycar pulverized glass bottles left on the bridge. In the middle of the trestle the engine choked and Middyhead, his eyes pressing rigidly forward, kicked at the long electric lead wire that ran, like a fat hose, from under his seat, between his legs, to the single chunky sparkplug in the red hot block. The engine banged, caught, fired and they sped onto the wagon tracks beyond the bridge. They hurtled through the air, wind whipping past the ribs of the old car and little bugs struck and crashed against the massive brass radiator. The smoke stack loomed in the distance, the faint sun lighted moist broken windows of tool sheds and caved-in shacks smeared with red clay, that beat past. Emily's heart pounded to the violent rhythm of the engine, one and two and three and, and her head rocked to the heavy pulse

of the flat spot in the wheel as it beat into the sand, thump, thump. The generaless leaned over and adjusted the knotted cord that tied Emily's feet. Whisps of hay and pellets of oats were tossed into her face by the oily wind that zoomed over the floor-boards of the car. They passed a windowless trolley car, warped and grey, covered with bits of rusted wire and surrounded by glittering bits of broken glass, that lay overturned in a vacant field. The generaless lifted the microphone: "Faster, Midyhead."

Click, click. He heard the croquet balls and mallets ticking out on the green lawn, heard shrill little shrieks of girlish laughter and a few small birds singing on the bare branches. The sun cut downward through the ivied window and covered him with a cold, early morning light. Henry's shoulders and back were twisted and cold on the hard linoleum of the kitchen floor and the sunlight pierced through his eyelids in a painful red haze. Click, click. His eardrums sent pain penetrating deep to the back of his skull. His mouth was full of dry powdery breakfast cereal and his cracking feet were numb and cold. A white fly buzzed over the heaps of dishes and tangled spoons and knives and a faint odor of gas drifted across the floor. Spat. A hard drop of water fell on his forehead, and for a moment he opened his eyes and saw the spread legs of the parson standing over him with a carefully tilted can of water. Another drop hit Henry's head. He tried to move but could not. Tendons running down his foot were hooked and cramped by the tongue of his shoe. His shirt, tight, shrunk, the tails high above his waistline, gripped his arms, strapped securely to his side. His upper arms ached and groaned, stiff crusts of muscles standing stripped and torn. Over the motion of the gently revolving floor, and beyond the drops of water pounding on his head and trickling down his face, he heard the soft rubber-soled shoes and the gentle clicking of the balls, the cry of a lively girl and the flash of hair ribbons. His throat was long and closed and the sun grew hotter on his eyes.

"Get up, Henry," the parson said, and peered closer to watch the water splash on his face.

The smokestack reared itself high above the hospital's glass walls, its steel terraces and concrete yards, and slowly filled the air above with a black porridge smoke which dulled the sunrise. Sharp angular beds, weights, pulleys, trays and tubes, were pushed to thin open windows, or pushed from room to room and

golden calfed girls clicked down the aisles or scribbled in red crayon on the charts. The front doors were two enormous hammered sheets of aluminum, studded with star-shaped heads of brass spikes, gleaming and heavy above the copper steps. The entire giant structure was made of cubes and tremendous oblong bricks of brass, solid glass squares, all heaped together about a few off-center globes and blinking lights. High with mountains of ice a river ran along the lower face of the hospital, churning with heavy, tar-covered tugs and wrecked bridges. Several strips of trimmed lawn covered the front and a few thin strips of vine tried to climb the vast clear white wall. A head peered from a window here and there and high overhead the smoke billowed the sky with blackness.

With a swooping rush the middycar settled to earth and rolled noisily up to the steps of the hospital, chugging, rattling. Middyhead cut the engine, pulled off his rubber gloves and lit a cigarette. Quickly they untied Emily's feet, took the gag from her mouth and pushed her out of the car door. "Please hurry, dear," said the generaless, and she and Beady settled back against the lumpy seat to wait. Emily walked up the copper steps alone, facing her distorted tall reflection in the aluminum. She tripped, caught herself and putting her shoulders to the door, pushed through.

Behind the littered desk was the enameled pig, peaked white cap topping red hair, a gold pen tucked behind her ear. As she thumbed page after page of the register, she tapped her little toes on the white uneven floor. Emily lifted her veil and coughed. A thin girl, gold medal pinned to her chest below a purple handkerchief, ran past them down the corridor, her hands held forth beneath a covered pan and chipped cosmetic set, a black rubber tube dangling from her pocket. Behind the desk a blank-faced steeple clock on the wall chimed each Catholic quarter hour in code, and the pig's red fingers smudged over the print.

She looked up. "Name?"

"Emily."

Red rose from the stool, pulled down her skirt and going to the large vault doors beside the clock she vigorously spun the silver wheel, first to the right, then the left, over and over. A red light flashed on. She walked down the black hallway of the vault, stooped to search through row upon row of orange drawers, dress drawn tight around her back. Finally Red came out, a little black card in her hand. "What's the trouble, kid?" "Oh nothing, really." Emily put her hand over her stomach as a short white-coated

orderly sauntered by with narrow, gleaming eyes and rust soiled trousers. "This way, then," said the nurse and Emily followed her down the narrowing broken tiles. The corridor was long, narrow and high, and black tunnels shot diagonally off from it every hundred feet. Red took Emily by the hand, pulling her along through the dim pink light, brushing their shoulders against long lines of single-filed patients with shaved heads and stiff white gowns. At each tunnel entrance stood an earphoned man who, listening to the voice of the central office, sang forth instructions to surgeons, messengers, florists and pages, and by the side of each of these men was a smoking iron trash receptacle. Wet lime slithered along the floors and down the walls, large keys rattled on Red's wooden hoop. As they walked, nozzles in the floor blew up their skirts. A sharp voice, "sit here, young woman." "Well," said Red, "I'll leave you now," and turning, she trotted away. The desk was in a small hole in the wall and Emily crouched before it. The man's head, the size of a tennis ball, bobbed up and down, gold-rimmed midget glasses shaking on his nose. He asked questions: bust, shoulders, glove size, hips.

"Ever worn glasses before?"

"No."

"Well, come on," he said, "take all those ribbons out of your hair and look into this machine."

He lit the sputtering burner, twisted dials, spun plastic knobs, watched needles jump, marked six crosses on her scalp, and laughing wildly, swung the machine into position. He forced her eyes against the forked lenses and timed the number of buttons down her blouse. After fastening a piece of garden hose around her arm and poking needles into each of the crosses on her scalp, he hunched over the desk and rapidly wrote with his chicken quill, blinking at the faces on the dials. An assistant kept hitting the back of her head with a mallet. The ball-headed man wrote his calculations on a large white card and hanging it around her neck from a loop of steel wire he pushed her again down the corridor. It split and split again, each segment lined with stacked pine boxes and a pungent smoke, rubber-wheeled carts glided by, stacks of crumbling eye charts piled in corners. The muscles across her abdomen flexed and unflexed and she crouched, as she wandered, to hide herself from view. Long rows of skulls were hung on pegs from the scrubbed walls, candles burning behind the eyes—part of an experiment, skulls that were still growing, and a short fat man climbed up and down on a wicker chair to measure them, steel tape measure dangling from his fingers,

a pair of iron ice tongs as calipers. The steady industrious whirl of the hospital was broken by men who loped along the corridors, tin buckets on their arms, ladling out solutions of iodine and foaming water, and by structural inspectors who beat along the walls with their short heavy hammers.

"Stop, young woman," shouted a thin matron with spotted white coat and stringy hair, and holding Emily's arm she peered closely at the white card. "I thought so," she said, and drawing back she leveled a large atomizer into Emily's face. A harsh red liquid squirted into her eyes and immediately a cotton fuzz grew about the skulls, covered the walls and floors and sealed her eyeballs in a filmy crust. One hand over her stomach, the other over her burning eyes, she ran on until, above the grinding of dynamos and the hiss of steam, she heard a faint rising and falling wave of squalls. She stopped and squinted. Behind an open iron mesh, slung in row upon row of canvas hammocks, were the new babies, each head covered with a shock of black hair, all the cheeks covered with matted black sideburns. From each hammock hung a tin cup and a haggard woman in a blue apron passed up and down between them, doling out the gruel. Emily watched the twisting shut eyes, fingers trying to clutch at the cups, and the laughing hag lumbering between the bobbing bodies, her thick legs spread wide.

Henry twisted and again opened his eyes. He saw the parson's rearing pillared legs, saw the planted thicknosed shoes. Henry tried to remember black legs running with water. He could not. His head close to the steel milkcan, he heard the hum of the ocean from the giant shell and heard, from its winding depths, the shifting of sand.

"Get up," said the parson. The words crashed through with terrifying light and he felt, with his numb tongue, the green taste of the day before.

"Havin' trouble wit de kid?" asked Joe, who was slouched over the kitchen sink sloshing water around inside his mouth, spitting through his teeth over the piles of dishes. The parson said nothing. Over the frosted air came the muffled sound of beating wings and the slow scraping of a rake in a frozen flower bed, the squeaking of an empty swing blown back and forth in the morning breeze. Henry, sprawled tightly on the floor in a waking sleep, painfully rolled his head again and stared dizzily upwards at the massive clerical form. Beneath one black stolid arm was a bulky yellow ledger, packed with envelopes and debts, columns

of red quavering figures. Henry waited for the book to fall and crush him, but the parson's fat hand was glazed, straight, and still.

The general leaned against the doorjamb, a large white pipe hanging below his jaw, faded campaign ribbons askew on his chest, rolls of white hair falling below the beaver hat. He looked at the distorted body of his son-in-law and watched the impressive figure of the parson, mitre thrown aside on the kitchen table. "Throw him in the g'asshouse. Damn good place for him," mumbled the general through the pipestem, focused his stern, red, sleepless eyes. Henry's eyes were watering, crossed, glasses hanging from one ear and still asleep he heard the chilled ticking of a clock and the rustling of leaves.

"Get up. I want to go over your accounts with you." Henry coughed, his red skeletal chest heaving between the parson's legs. He shut his eyes.

Emily tried to shut the babies from her mind, but, her eyes closed, the black heads multiplied, bobbed faster, and swarmed over her from behind the mesh. She ran, white card smacking against her chest, bumping breathlessly past blurred white coats and kicking up flurries of sawdust, wads of cotton, and tufts of clipped blond hair. She smelled the sour alcohol of hair tonic and long greasy working shears and heard the hot whirl of electric blades. Running she waved to and fro, her eyes burned almost shut from the red liquid, her damp hair hanging behind her. Holding her nose she passed the emergency stations, towel-covered pans beneath red ominous lights, passed open pigeon holes containing stretchers propped on sawhorses. A senile, his head gashed open, shrieked at her and she ran faster. Finally, chest constricted, she leaned against a low green door. Floors above her the smoke stack breathed quicker and the black smoke, striking against a low thick ceiling of clouds, pressed downwards about the hospital. Throughout the building a low rumble of hacked coughing started up. Tissues were brought to gasping mouths; corded throats, with knives in hand, coughed through wrinkled unwashed masks. The green door jerked open, leather fingers wound about Emily's arm and a coughing man, spasmodic face below a bright reflector, spoke in her ear. "Come in, Emily," said Dr. Smith.

The room was empty except for a narrow angular white table, a dull overhead light, and a few belts, trusses, and bulbs piled below a dark grilled window. Girders, riveters, and a red

sky were muraled on the walls, and the shrill whistle of tugs struck her ears. Light, broken through the grillwork, shot in frenzied beams over the scraped floors, and the glare of acetylene torches flashed from the curving hook in the doctor's hand. "What seems to be the trouble?" he asked.

"Christ," said one of the riveters, "Spike catches dem red hot hunks in his bare hands, pounds 'em inta de box wit his fist."

Below rushed the screaming chains, frothing river, and tar dressed figures with glittering hatchets. Dr. Smith pulled a rope and hot streaming air poured into the room. The second red riveter wiped sweat from his black bull neck. The doctor stropped a scalpel, looked at the woman from the side of his head.

"A child," said Emily, "I'm going to have a baby. With a black head. I want to know when . . ." She saw the first riveter look at her in contempt, black glaring eyes. She wept.

"Now, now," said Dr. Smith, "it's not as bad as all that."

"Smack the god damned thing wi' a hammer, quick," shouted the second riveter. The steam hissed.

"Here," said Smith, "Let me take a look."

"Oh, no," she said. She put her hands over her skirt. The furnace roared, flames leapt from the hot box, parched tongues shriveled over the molten steel.

"Let me see."

"Oh, no." A whistle screeched.

With a violent effort he heaved her onto the table and Emily felt the broad flat straps falling over her body, needles jabbing into her arms.

"Drive the damn thing in," screamed the riveter.

The examination began.

17.

Shaving brush and mug, soap cake, comb and rusty blade swirled together in the rose colored basin beneath a torrent of hot water and billowing steam. Henry rubbed his finger on the misty mirror until one eye glared out, then extended the line through the damp haze until he saw both eyes. As he watched, the eyes began to fade, covered with beads of dampness. With a quick movement he smeared a circle on the glass with his palm so that his whole face shone through and leaning forward, hands gripping the pink edges of the bowl, the scented smell of soap, powder, and dry steam rising against his nostrils and throat, he peered closely at his short yellow beard and reddening crown.

The razor hung loosely from his fingers, his mouth tasted of soap. His shirt and undershirt were tangled on the floor under his stockinged feet and a cold shaft of air cut from the open stained-glass window through the heat to rake across his thin shivering back. He burned his fingers in the bubbling water, hot water scorched his cheeks and scratched neck, and the yellow beard matted and caught in the trembling razor. He heard sharp clear voices, the swish of skirts, through the open window.

"Beautiful shot. My God, what an eye, darling."

"I think we deserve a cigarette for that one, partner."

The modest laughter of the South American rang out. The dull stamping of a horse rang from the barn across the driveway.

Henry slowly pulled the rough blade from the lobe of his ear down to his chin and dabbed at his cheek with a damp red-blotched piece of tissue paper. The room was littered with tissue; damp pieces crumpled on the tiles, hung from the blue mica seat, stuck to the flowered shower curtain and filled the new pink baby's duck-covered pot. His trousers were spattered with suds and water, his hands were raw, his mouth twisted. He shivered with anger. He slipped, dabbed again. Amid the wet towels on the floor lay his electric razor, shining red case cracked, the gears gummed. He kicked it from under foot. In the row of rotted family toothbrushes, bristles worn, handles stained, hung the newly purchased miniature baby's brush, ribbons dangling below its rubber teeth. A glob of soap fell on its head, it teetered and slipped into the boiling basin. Water poured from his face, trickled around his waist and he tried to listen for the pounding surf.

"Oh, you awful man!" The adventuress's voice, laughter.

His ears twitched. The scent of coagulated gutter leaves and green pine soap, the smell of insecticide and lichen covered trunks, the brittleness of morning air and glittering slate, the muffled stench of boiling towels, frosty grass below and trembling mirror, swirled about him, flushed and drawn as a stranger's face. He pulled his face up over his shoulder, drew the flesh tight between his fingers. In the distance he heard the fluttering unhappy cries of a hundred spanie's, bushes wagging, faces scratching at cold wire. Morning. The pack cried out. Quickly he slapped a towel against his cheek and, head wrapped in fumes of steam, he waited for the hand to steady itself.

Noel leaned on his croquet mallet, soft dirty hands beneath his chin, tie-ends hanging from his rump'led collar. Close-set eyes stared out over the thin white shining fields, stared bleakly at the distant film of river ice. His saddle shoes were wet.

"Hey, it's your turn!"

"C'mon, play!"

With an effort he righted his pudgy tousled form, shot and missed.

Gaylor Basistini, alone on the terrace, watched critically, then chalked a giant zero on the slate.

Specks of hair, like grains of sand, stuck to his wrists and white speckled halfmoons curled round his nails. Head still empty, temples cold, he forced himself to wait, continue, burn his flesh, throwing towel after towel into the loaded hamper. The violet water burned his cheeks in hard red planes and his hands wrinkled and turned white.

The bolt shot from the door, a toweled figure leapt from the steam bath, and sweltering, red face wet and turbaned, stood near the mica seat. Henry paused, water dripping from the jug, and looked at the wrapped man.

Expositor: You brought it all on yourself, Henry.

Henry: No. You're wrong, because I'm too old. I couldn't.

Expositor: It's too late to be old. You'll take it for walks and play with it in the snow.

Henry: I don't like the snow. And it's not my fault, because I never was capable. Never you see. It's all a mistake.

Expositor: It happened in a dream. It happened in one of those dazzling dreams, a dream of your omnipotence, when you lost track of time, when you were caught and fooled by space, by a shadow of perfume.

Henry: Stop! I was too old.

Expositor: You'll catch your death of cold when you walk in the snow. It will want to play and run but your hands will be blue, scarves over your nose will not be enough. Your voice will die out in the ice. It will toddle and babble but you will be lost in cracking shelves of ice. It is your fault. Beware the snow, Henry. Beware of the cold days when you must walk with the child. It will take away your old age and you will fall in the snow. Beware winter.

Slowly Henry's voice repeated; "Beware winter, beware the snow and the child. Look out for dreams. Beware." The old man closed the door into the steam room. Eyes shut, motionless, he wiped the lather from his face with a blown-up towel and ran it

round the crown of his head. The young dogs yelped, beads frozen on the whiskers from their snouts, the pads of the paws slashed with thin red lines, coats pasted to their gaunt sides. The gardener with his striped trainman's cap and mudcaked coveralls eyed the dogs, put the horn to his mouth and sent shrill strains over the morning country side, calling the pack. The water ran hotter. He heard the blasts of the trumpet, the cold sharp alcoholic smell of sound and the pounding of horses' hoofs. They clattered by, brandy bottles banging on leather, fat red riders rolling in laughter. He heard them float past the house, heard the spattering of spurs. He leaned against the radiator until red welts shot up his white leg, until he smelled burning cloth.

In his room, with the door closed, he could hear nothing. All about him was the silence of frost when the chattering has ceased and the walls turn faintly blue. The chill of a room mapped in squares, and he thought that later he would fix the furnace. He thought that he would bolt the gates and walk along by the crumbling walls, his face hidden in a blue cowl, and as the red sun rose he would make a sign, lonely in the open vestibule, that peace had come. He fumbled with the buttons, turning from the mirror so he wouldn't watch himself. He brushed the golden tassels on his robe. He would stand in the door and watch the sun rise on an empty land.

The parson sat still, the ledger on his knees. He waited.

"Ah," said Joe Ottoe, "let's take a break." The mallets were left propped against the trees.

The adventuress threw her polo coat over her shoulders, listened for a moment, but heard nothing.

Holding his thick white flannels doubled about his waist, he walked down the driveway to the fence by the barns and looked over the briar-covered hills. The mules pulled at their tethers, the bony ageless horse lay in the weeds. The sun was a dull red in the morning mist and nearby his brothers rattled ice in empty glasses. The car came slowly down the hill and stopped at the side door, engine slowly turning over, cold dust settling on the hood.

When she ran across the lawn, hair loose and flying, colored skirt whirling about her knees, he knew that she was not going to have a child. The flowers around her neck were white with dew, and as she ran she laughed, and her face was momentarily bright.

"My goodness," thought Henry, "she *does* look young." She ran quickly towards him.

Gaylor blew loudly on his whistle. "All right," he called, "it's time to play."

THE CITY STOPPED IN TIME

Claudio Solar

Translated from the Spanish by Warren Carrier.

CANTO I

Dead friend, angels of passion
hard beaten in your happy
entrails:
the ash of your pure lineage guards you!

Because when the earth shook its belly,
as if bitten by a monstrous child,
the guitars became blind
and there were invading cries,
and the business man, the lawyer,
the beggar, the proletariat,
embraced each other on the grave of grief.

Oh, fruitful rod,
glass of rain, seesaw on which the day swings
between lubricous garlicks of savoury ash.
How you have your back to the wind,
what wing of endearing pith beats you,
what potent oars pulse your long journey.

Defile of shadows,
pass! Let them summon you though your temples
traversed by lunar tube.
Here I am alone,
accompanied by a watch of fatigue
divided into laments.

Here am I with my kisses of urgent blood,
with green vigor, almost trembling,
with a yellow rush placed upon death.

The silence is nothing
but a voice profoundly confused;
nothing but the shadow
of invaded shadows;
but with eyes surprised
in their habitual cornea by lament or wound.

Oh, stump of shadow with your spider
of feet and hair of misfortune;
infinite cypresses against time
doubled, beheaded,
and how many dahlias scarcely weeping,
and now many rivers enamoured of death.

Oh, rings of stupified bone,
journey to purified mansion,
rooms your funeral witnesses
and your song of unread rose.
What a long dream on your stone pillow,
what deep roots in your bed,
oh, what funereal tunnel where your heart beats
with pulse of silence.

CANTO II

And God said: Build the house of fire and pain;
and in order to compose it they raised a city against the cardinals.
Men curved their backs as in an amorous rite.
It was constructed against the North, fleeing the blast of the
winds,
as a sharp woman who gathers her petals of light.

Thus bound, brick upon brick, sand upon sand
with dark rain doves towards the basilicas
of the dark roofs, with savour of humidity and shadow.
Upon them the sun burst its ripe grain
and a woman put her smile in the first window.

The wheels, with their nervous bleating, advanced
from the valley of the hand's concavity.

There was a river of clay beating upon the buildings,
the racial color arose, the cordial union
of eyes with eyes and arms with the blood of the blood.

And the children played with snails of humidity
dream against dream.
The carpenters hammered the dawn,
and the dawn answered with awkward cocks, with swallows
of thick cards, and a foot of fire, stylizing shadows.

Until the visage of a bell
fell upon the lean bulls of routine.
And there were wide red tongues against the timeless sky,
and other blue voices beaten toward the South.

There arose, then, in the windmill wings of the wind
windmills of night
and honey frozen viscously,
a lung of thick smoke
diluted the bluish song of the factories;
vibrant chimneys
watchtowers of human shadows.

Thus, marched men
toward the infinite, age by age.

CANTO III

Bread grew in its odorous sweetness
purified by hands of mothers, sisters, lovers;
hoes flowered in the fields
and cows lowed with their sweet milk.
There opened in the hills the wound of the road
and raucous laughter advanced dancing
between the seasons of honey and wine.


In winter there were drunken cobblers
who put shoes with nails of light into the shadows
and peddlers rolling up fogs with their carts.
And poor students who made love
in hotels of doubtful penumbra
with women gaily bedecked in misery.

Mute females, distant from me by the spinning of compass,
with a crepitation of lips drowned in their humidity
coupling design and fate,
appear in my round tin kisses
caught in my arms of twisted fragrance,
in the simple honeycomb of lost words.

Thus fabricated the sponge of dream
the sons of the sons
and in the days when winter bread
catches its musk-flower, its pearl from the water,
they watched their width grow
as sleeves of pain.

Oh, jellyfish of salt invading perspectives
and poor houses that look, abandoned on the corners,
toward the streets;
what mud of silent algae
whipped a broken glass, a mirror of burning filth?

Oh, wild transformation of city rising,
how the automobiles redeem their wheels
removing the cobwebs from morning!
How whirl the cyclical helixes
and their sonorous arrows,
with little girls of turbid gravestone eyes.

 What a pure handkerchief of fog
with a coin of light tied in the corner!

CANTO IV

But a day is a day,
and a night is more night and violent because it is the night of
time,
summoned by sinister archangels
or by signs known by peoples and peoples.

It was already said,
and if a ball of fire rolled from the mouth of the river
until it sank in the entrails of the city,
it was because the child most childish
had vomited his first dream,
his first tragic wing of bat.

Because the plural sign of the adobe
and the long and exact cipher of the workers
that follow each other in the city,
placing their vase of lime
and tracing the hard geometry of the scaffoldings,
went beyond the unthinkable days
and flowing nights.

And they were:
Martin, the carpenter with caliper fingers
and a palm of carpenter's square;
Joseph, the stonecutter who arranged the mountain
with his third arm of steel
stealing sparks from the stones and from the sun.

Peter, the builder, with his forehead of lime
and dark lines under his eyes;
furniture-makers, iron-workers, and the brothers of the fighters,
John, the orator, conductor of masses,
of dolorous chest, with a biblical red dove
in the root of his veins.

And prostitutes with their wornout phonograph
and burning hose—hands of silk viscously sensual,
twin feminine forms,
cylinders with varnish of desire—
Ay, their photographic laugh glued to their lips,
oh, figures of poor mayolica!

All lie forgotten by the new voice,
by the subterranean screech of the new sign
that surges as a mountain of roaring shadows
upon the reduced mirror of silence,
that comes arranging the limits of the night,
overflowing the walls of fear.

CANTO V

Then the city constructed against the North
raised its eyelids of mortal sand against life
and advanced toward death.
There was a silent breath of ash and a humidity
of bones

destroying vital sums, snatching
the trembling skin of the earth's belly,
exploring it with cries of digital teeth.

Oh, my city drowned in dust and slow sulphur,
oh, pure song of blood and lament:
dream, son of my wandering, drag your architectonic
fingers
with nails of bitter spikes,
voices wasted in their empty stalk.

The earth was rent and lightning
yellowly burning
removed the bowels bitten by fire;
there remained a single hand . . .
A hand extended with convulsed fingers
sowing tremors in its growing nails.

Oh terror . . .
How to hear at night that our own voices call us
from the cemeteries.

Maddened horses, skies that come and go,
mountains succeeding themselves upon a river of fishes,
eyes raining corners, populating the windows,
ears yielding, leaping and extended.

Voices that corrode, moss that sows musk,
forests that rain lichen,
rugs multiplying the dust of their dust,
all strangely alien—nothing more native—
and the eyes of man, the tendons of man
broken as stones of the burning shroud.

And the blood that beats the adobes and the lights
surprised by the shadow.
Thus, as a cyclone made of strange misery
as a trembling and roaring voice of hysterical lightning
as sinister cachinations, fatally deafening
one after the other, one toward another
mortally.

As a cry of bees pursing themselves tied to a colt
of madness.

And the sand fought by sand
on the meeting of blind moons.

The stars wavered beating themselves upon the walls.
the brick wanted to be a swallow or a fugacious star
and death wanted to pay for life beating
bones and against bones.

The existential worms rode spurring
in a wide and repeated circle of flagelated centaurs;
the passing of the passing was heard
within all uniformity, following itself,
of life drowning in death.

CANTO VI

As a lightless guitar
that advances between ash and ash
and a breast that shatters against the stars
its spurt of blood.

A vestige of open-mouthed shadow
and a vein leaping in its beginning
between stones and closed lips.

Oh, rain of black leaves,
eyelid of shadowed himidity.

Oh, woman with mouth of fine algae
and viscous light of silence
how many birds rigid in your cheeks.

Dust falls upon dust,
wounded lilies, funeral flour
sifted host.

Sand travels to sand
in stopped time, beyond plural throats
and fire fragmented into red stalks.

Trees that shake peduncles of shadow
burgeoning minutes extraordinarily long.

A distant drum in the depths of the mountain
marks to the ear the step of death
and of terror.

Worms and blackbirds with blind wings
with pupils of ritual gangrene
seek wounds
amid a continuous falling of lilies
dark, pulverized,
upon the city.

CANTO VII

An arm that seeks eyes
and my heart that explores a mouth of shadow,
mothers with eyes deeply wounded,
with a piece of son soaked in mud
acridly salty.

And streets of cardinals gone astray
someone opening a path with a dead shoe
through a wall of muscles
and unsated breasts.

Nocturnal funerals
the dead empty in their shells, hidden
in the streets with a deaf rumor
of lantern or lightning.

Oh, money that grief crumbles
and mirrors that shake the dust from their flaming
voices,
buildings that a breeze and a lament
make dizzy in their ardent prancing,
near hands, indices crushing themselves,
ringfingers and divided wrists.

And a long path of yellow trucks
and blue
and handcarts carrying the eyes of the dead.
There is a ditch for the dead, of tenebrous water
constructed of legs and arms and annulated
fingers.

And here is man facing a throat
as a brick from a grave thrown up to earth
throwing death by the shovelful
in a waxy river, gelatinous with flesh.

And the wine that runs away through the streets
from the broken jars,
drunk in gutters by a sleeve of ear
or a mortal eyelid.

CANTO VIII

Ecclesiastical dress confessing the penitent, confusedly repenting,
clamoring to a heaven closed to lonely earth.
And lovers surprised in the sweetest embrace
remained united by a honey of blood.
Vases in mourning tendered their nets of bitterness
to the shore of the hill of grief.

Pale girls rolled from window to window
in the transfigured city.
There was a tremor of beetles born
in the root of the fingernails.

There was a breeze of dolorous justifications
and evil omens.
Because death came on horseback in a thunder
of grief and misery.
And children with hungry lips and sad mirrors
sobbing.

CANTO XI

Then all became equal
and the chief takes the hand of the carpenter,
in whose dark down there grows a friendly limbo,
in order to imprison a visage of water
or a vase of mixed salt.

Blind drops that join friendships and stretch fingers
with dust and fatigue.

Hours that recall each other infinitely and weep
as capitals empty of tenderness.

Trains that blow cries between the South and the North
and there are armies of painful pilgrims
with a corpse on their back.

Caravans with an overcoat of olive and graphite
and under the carps of swollen ring
plates of foam with lentils boiling their emerald
savourously stuck to their nutritious coin.

A nocturnal soup with garlic of sifted light
and nitrous milk with its velvet tongue
seeking the lips of a dead child.

Confusion sown on multiplied corners
as a sea of divided fish
and algae of death combing their hair of nettles
against a light of haircloth.

Artisans of pain:
how goes my hand soaked in the grief of those who suffer.
More misery upon misery,
more tears extending their star of bitter salt
upon the grooves of old age and the wounded hands of the poor.

CANTO X

Oh, what project of tentacular sun
seeking a breath of nothing,
what magic gift of vigil
or of the builder's trowel
with sand, ash and dead eyes.

What resurgence of tepid griefs
and new sons on the breast of hunger
and swelling of bellies that speak
of my city that is reborn.
Oh, pure foundations,
countries illuminated in the beginning of the herb
that emerges to greet the butterfly
of its tubular roots.

Ah, my peace,
my adored peace that is reborn
and never exists,

but in the ligneous saps of plum trees
that surprised bees explore in their fingernail branches.
What message of honored earth transmitted
until it becomes a lunar telegram
on the buds of burgeoning light.

What confidence reborn,
what vital beat injected from the throbs of the blood
and how necessary the limpidity of its pure symbol;
how clear its virtual antlike existence
or of gears;
what fingers of miracle, as oars,
whirling in the river of events.

Solitary voice, urgent, road
among tepid roses of mortal marmalade
and bones as drowned in the shadow of a sound
or in a turning windmill wing
or among sexual forms of rigid desire.

Bones with name,
with an occult kiss on their pithy flute,
toward new conquests,
to the elaboration of a new existential bread
on a pavement of drowned arms
and burning countersigns.

Oh, proletarian voice, keen germ,
primordial flame enlarged;
upon your toad of tedium
sink the veins of death
and the blue fly of misfortune.

Lift your marvelous global artery,
your wounded light,
your song of fern and beet root
that beats flour and unread clover
on the angular table of stone and water.

There exist so many things awaiting you,
open dreams with their infinite journey;
because there are women, workers,
of slow eyes and yellow voice

and men of happy torsos
with a flame of sweat
and a fish of painful saliva.

Oh, city of potent climate
and ringed forehead, oh splendid hand of polished star,
you fly to the infinite on your winding snail.
What wide beaches follow you,
what pure cylinders of forceps
and a voice of solitary plastered arch.

What a multitude with eyes of fireflies
and feet of meager grain;
how much water shaking you.
Who can stop your slow journey
of sleeping fire;
who will equal your bread of bright hazelnut
and wine of weeping brambleberry.

Whose will be the shadow that will explore you,
whose the voice that will distend the seals of your wound.
Oh, my city of bullying wreath
of peduncular bell
and cross of painful blood
en route toward the cardinals of the South.

CITY STOPPED IN TIME . . .

TWO STORIES

Jorge Luis Borges

INVESTIGATIONS OF THE WRITINGS OF HERBERT QUAIN

HERBERT QUAIN HAS DIED at Roscommon; I have confirmed the fact that the Literary Supplement of "The Times" scarcely gives him half a column of necrological pity, in which there is not one laudatory epithet which is not amended (or seriously corrected) by an adverb. The "Spectator," in its pertinent issue, is without doubt less laconic and perhaps more cordial, but it compares Quain's first book, *The God of Labyrinth*, with one of Mrs. Agatha Christie and others with those of Gertrude Stein: evocations that no one will judge to be inevitable and that would not have pleased the dead man. Certainly, he never considered himself a cynic, not even on those peripatetic nights of literary conversation during which the man who already has fatigued the presses, invariably plays at being Monsieur Teste or Doctor Samuel Johnson. . . . He clearly perceived the experimental nature of his books: admirable perhaps because of their novelty and a certain laconic sincerity, but not because of the powers of passion. "I am like the odes of Cowley," he wrote to me from Longford the sixth of March of 1939. "I do not belong to art but to the mere history of art." For him there was no discipline that was inferior to history.

I have repeated a modesty of Herbert Quain; naturally this humility does not exhaust his thinking. Flaubert and Henry James have accustomed us to suppose that works of art are infrequent and laboriously executed; the Sixteenth Century (let

us recall the *Voyage of Parnassus*; let us recall Shakespeare's fate) did not share that disconsolate opinion. Neither did Herbert Quain. It seemed to him that good literature is common enough and that there is hardly any conversation on the street that does not attain its level. It also seemed to him that the aesthetic act cannot lack some element of amazement and that it is difficult to amaze oneself by heart. With smiling sincerity he deplored "the servile and obstinate conservation" of books of the past. . . I don't know whether his vague theory can be justified; I do know that his books try too hard to achieve astonishment.

I deplore having lent, unreturnably, to a lady the first one that he published. I have said that it was a detective story, *The God of the Labyrinth*; I can add that the editor put it on sale in the last days of November of 1933. In the first days of December, the agreeable and arduous involutions of the *Siamese Twin Mystery* tasked London and New York; I prefer to attribute the failure of our friend's novel to that ruinous coincidence. Also (I want to be absolutely sincere) to its deficient execution and the useless and frigid pomp of certain descriptions of the sea. At the end of seven years, it is impossible for me to recover the lesser details of the action; here is its plan; impoverished (as it now is) by my forgetfulness. In the opening pages there is an undecipherable murder, a slow discussion in the intermediate ones, a solution in the last ones. The riddle having been cleared, there is a long and retrospective paragraph which contains this sentence: "They all thought that the meeting of the two chess players had been accidental." This sentence permits one to understand that the solution was erroneous. The anxious reader revises the pertinent chapters and discovers *another* solution, which is the true one. The reader of that singular book is more quick-sighted than the detective.

The "regressive, ramified novel" *April March*, whose third (and only) part was written in 1836, is even more heterodox. Nobody, when he judges that novel, refuses to admit that it is a game; it is permissible to recall that the author never considered it anything else. "For that work, I recover," I heard him say, "the essential characteristics of all games: symmetry, arbitrary laws, tediousness." Even the name is a weak "calembour": it does not signify the *March of April* but literally *April March*. In its pages somebody has perceived an echo of the doctrines of Dunne; Quain's prologue prefers to invoke that inverted world of Bradley, in which death precedes birth and the scar the wound,

and the wound the blow (*Appearance and Reality*, 1897, page 215*). The worlds that *April March* proposes are not regressive, the manner of narrating them is.

Regressive and ramified, as I have already said. The volume is composed of thirteen chapters. The first narrates the ambiguous dialogue of some unknown men on a path. The second tells of events on the eve of the first chapter. The third, also retrogressive narrates the events of *another* possible eve of the first; the fourth, those of yet another. Each one of these three eves (which scrupulously excludes the other) is ramified into three other eves of very different natures. Consequently, the complete work consists of nine novels; each novel of three long chapters. (The first of these is, naturally, common to all of them.) Of those novels, one is of a symbolic nature; another, supernatural; another a detective story; another, psychological; another, Communist, another anti-Communist, etcetera. Perhaps a diagram would help to explain the structure.

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Concerning this structure, it would be fitting to repeat what Schopenhauer said of the twelve categories of Kant: he sacrifices everything to a symmetrical fury. Foresightedly, one of the

*Alas! the erudition of Herbert Quain! Alas! page 215 of a book dated 1897! An interlocutor of the *Politics*, by Plato, had already discovered a similar regression: that of the Sons of the Land or The Autochthonous, who, subjected to the influence of an inverse rotation of the cosmos, passed from old age to maturity, from maturity to childhood, to disappearance and nothingness. Also Theopompus, in his *Philipics*, speaks of certain northern fruits that grow within him who eats them, the same retrograde process It would be more interesting to imagine an inversion of Time: A state in which we would remember the future and ignore, or hardly foresee the past. Cf. the tenth canto of the "*Inferno*," verses 97-102, in which prophetic vision and far-sightedness are compared.

nine stories is unworthy of Quain; the best is not the one that he originally conceived, x 4; it is the fantasy, x 9. Others are deformed by poor jokes and useless pseudo-exactness. Those who read them in chronological order (i. e. x 3, 1, z) lose the peculiar savour of the strange book. Two stories—x 7, x 8—lack individual value; juxtaposition lends them efficacy. . . I don't know whether I should point out that after *April March* was published, Quain repented the ternary order and predicted that those who imitated him would choose the binary

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and that the demiurges and the gods would choose the infinite order; infinite stories, infinitely ramified.

The heroic comedy in two acts *The Secret Mirror* is very different but also retrospective. In the books already reviewed the methodical complexity had benumbed the imagination of the author, but here its development has more free play. The first act (the longest) takes place in the country house of General Thrale, C. I. E., near Melton Mowbray. The invisible center of the plot is Miss Ulrica Thrale, the General's eldest daughter. Through a dialogue we see her imperfectly, amazon and haughty; we suspect that she does not tend to delve into literature; the newspapers announce her engagement to the Duke of Rutland; the newspapers deny the engagement. A playwright, Wilfred Quarles, worships her; she has presented him once with an inattentive kiss. The characters have vast fortunes and blue blood, the affections are noble although vehement; the dialogue seems to waver between the mere verbosity of Bulwer-Lytton and the epigrams of Wilde or Mr. Philip Guedalla. There is a nightingale and a night; there is a secret duel on a terrace. (Almost completely imperceptible, there are some odd contradictions, sordid details.) The characters of the first act reappear in the second—with other names. The "playwright" Alfred Quarles is a commissioner from Liverpool; his real name, John William Quigley. Miss Thrale exists; Quigley has never seen her but he morbidly collects her photographs from "The Tatler" or "The Sketch."

Quigley is the author of the first act. The unlikely or improbable "country house" is the Jewish-Irish boarding-house where he lives, transfigured or magnified by him. . . The plot of the acts is parallel but in the second everything is slightly horrid, everything is postponed or frustrated. When *The Secret Mirror* opened, the critics pronounced the names of Freud and Julian Green. The mention of the first seems to me totally unjustified.

Fame reported *The Secret Mirror* as being a Freudian comedy; that propitious (and deceitful) interpretation determined its success. Unfortunately, Quain had already reached his fortieth birthday and was acclimated to being unsuccessful and did not resign himself graciously to a change of regimen. He decided to retaliate. Towards the end of 1939 he published *Statements*; perhaps the most original of his books, without a doubt the least praised and the most secret one. Quain used to argue that the reader was an extinguished species. "There is no European (he reasoned) who is not a writer, either potentially or actually." He also averred that of the diverse sorts of happiness which literature can minister, the highest was invention. Since not all men are capable of that sort of happiness, many would have to be contented with simulated images. For those "imperfect writers," who form a legion, Quain wrote the eight stories of the book *Statements*. Each of them foresees or promises a good plot voluntarily frustrated by the author. One—not the best—hints two plots. The reader, distracted by vanity, believes he himself invented them. From the third, "The Rose of Yesterday," I have committed the ingenuousness of extracting "The Circular Ruins" which is one of the stories of the book *The Garden of the Forking Paths*.

1941

THE CIRCULAR RUINS

"And if he left off dreaming about you. . ."
Through the Looking-Glass. IV.

NOBODY SAW HIM LAND in the complete night, nobody saw the bamboo canoe sinking in the sacred swamp; but in a few days nobody ignored the fact that the taciturn man came from the South and that his homeland was one of the infinite villages which

are upstream, on the violent mountain side, where the Zend language is not contaminated by Greek and where leprosy is infrequent. Certain it is that the gray man kissed the mud, climbed the river bank without parting (probably without feeling) those sharp edges that lacerated the flesh, and that he dragged himself, dizzy and bloody, up to the circular precinct that is crowned by a tiger or horse of stone, which once was the color of fire and now is that of ashes. That circle is a temple which old fires had devoured and the malarial jungle had profaned and whose god does not receive man's worship. The stranger stretched out below the pedestal. He was awakened by the sun high in the sky. Without surprise he ascertained that his wounds had healed; closed his pale eyes and slept, not because of human weakness but because of strength of will. He knew that that temple was the place which required his invincible purpose; he knew that the unceasing trees had not succeeded in strangling, downstream, the ruins of another propitious temple, also of gods burnt and dead; he knew his immediate obligation was sleep. Towards midnight the unconsolable cry of a bird awoke him. Traces of bare feet, some figs and a ewer told him that the men of the place had respectfully spied on his sleep and solicited his favor or feared his magic. He felt the coldness of fright and in the dilapidated wall he found a sepulchral niche and covered himself with unknown leaves.

The purpose that guided him was not impossible, although it was supernatural. He wanted to dream a man: he wanted to dream him with detailed completeness and to transpose him into reality. That magical project exhausted all the space of his soul; if somebody had asked him his own name or anything about the life he had led, he would not have succeeded in answering. The uninhabited and crumbling temple suited him because it was a minimum of the visible world; the nearness of the laborers was also good because these took care of providing for his frugal needs. Rice and fruit from their offerings were sufficient nourishment for his body, devoted to the single task of sleeping and dreaming.

At the beginning, the dreams were chaotic; a bit later, of a dialectical sort. The stranger dreamed that he was in the middle of a circular amphitheatre that somehow was the burnt temple: clouds of taciturn students exhausted the tiers; the faces of the last ones hung at a distance of many centuries and at star light, but they were completely clear. The man gave them lessons in anatomy, cosmography, magic: the faces listened anxiously and

tried to respond comprehensibly, as though they had guessed the importance of that examination, which would redeem one of them from their condition of vain appearances and would interpolate him in the world of reality. In his sleep and while he was awake, the man pondered the answers of his ghosts, he did not let himself be deceived by impostors, he foresaw in certain perplexities a growing intelligence. He was looking for a soul who deserved to take part in the universe.

After nine or ten nights he realised with some bitterness that he could hope for nothing from those students who accepted his doctrine passively but that he could from those who sometimes risked a reasonable contradiction. The first group, although worthy of love and of kind affection, could not amount to individuals; the other group pre-existed slightly more. One afternoon (now the afternoons were also tributaries of the dream, now he was not awake except for a couple of hours at daybreak) he dismissed forever the vast illusory school and kept a single student. This was a taciturn melancholy boy, sometimes ungovernable, with a sharp face that was a repetition of his dreamer's features. He was not disconcerted for long over the brusque elimination of his fellow pupils; his progress at the end of a few private lessons, was such as to amaze the teacher. However, the catastrophe happened. One day the man emerged from sleep as from a viscous desert, saw the empty afternoon light which he soon confused with daybreak and he suddenly understood that he had not dreamed. All that night and all day, he was overwhelmed by the intolerable lucidity of insomnia. He wanted to explore the jungle, to grow feeble; amongst the hemlocks, he barely gained a few spasmodic periods of weak dreams, briefly streaked with visions of a rudimentary sort: useless ones. He wanted to assemble the school and hardly had he articulated a few brief words of exhortation, than the school fell apart, disappeared. In the almost perpetual wakefulness tears of anger burnt his old eyes.

He understood that the earnest desire of modeling the incoherent and giddy matter of which dreams are composed is the most difficult undertaking that a man can attempt, even though he solve riddles of superior and inferior levels: much more difficult than to knit a rope of sand or to coin the faceless wind. He understood that an initial calamity was inevitable. He swore to forget the enormous hallucination which had led him astray at the beginning and he hunted another method of work. Before using it, he dedicated a month to restoring the strength wasted during the delirium. He abandoned all premeditation of dream-

ing and almost without interruption, he managed to sleep a reasonable stretch of the day. The rare times that he dreamed during that period, he did not pay attention to the dreams. In order to resume the task, he waited for the disk of the moon to be perfect. Then, in the afternoon, he cleansed himself in the waters of the river, adored the planetary gods, pronounced the just syllables of a powerful name and slept. Almost immediately, he dreamed of a beating heart.

He dreamed it as being active, warm, secret, of the size of a clenched fist, garnet colored in the dark recess of a human body still without face or sex; with precise love he dreamed it during the fourteen lucid nights. Each night he perceived it with greater clarity. He did not touch it: he confined himself to witnessing it, to observing it, perhaps to correcting it with a look. From many distances and many angles he perceived it, he lived it. The fourteenth night he grazed the artery of the lung with his index finger and then the whole heart, from within and without. He was satisfied by the examination. Deliberately, during one night he did not dream: then he picked up the heart again, invoked the name of a planet and undertook the vision of another of the principle organs. Before a year was up, he reached the skeleton, the eye-lids. The innumerable hairs were perhaps the most difficult task. He dreamed an entire man, a young person, but this one did not stand up nor did he talk nor could he open his eyes. Night after night, the man dreamed him asleep.

In the gnostic cosmogonies, the demiurges mould a red Adam who does not manage to stand; the dream Adam built by the magician's nights was as clumsy and rough and elemental as that Adam of dirt. One afternoon, the man almost destroyed all his work, but he repented. (It would have been better for him to have destroyed it.) The supplications to the earth and river divinities having been exhausted, he threw himself at the feet of the image which was perhaps a tiger and perhaps a colt, and implored its unknown aid. That evening he dreamed of the statue. He dreamed it alive, quivering: it was not an atrocious bastard of the tiger and colt but simultaneously the two vehement creatures and also a bull, a rose, a tempest. That multiple god revealed to him that his terrestrial name was Fire, that in that circular temple (and in others that were the same) he had been offered sacrifices and was worshipped and that he would magically animate the dreamed ghost, in such a way that all creatures, except for the Fire himself and the dreamer, would believe he was a man of flesh and bones. He ordered that once he

had been instructed in the rites, he would be sent to the other crumbling temple whose pyramids are still standing downstream so that a voice might glorify him in that deserted building.

The magician carried out these orders. He devoted a term (which finally embraced two years) to unveiling the secrets of the universe and of the worship of fire to him. It hurt intimately to be parted from him. Using pedagogic necessities as a pretext, he lengthened the hours dedicated to dreaming. Also, he even remade the man completely, perhaps deficiently. Sometimes he was bothered by the impression that all this had already taken place. . . Generally his days were happy ones; when he closed his eyes he thought: "Now I shall be with my son." Or, less frequently: "The son that I have engendered awaits me and if I do not go he will not exist."

Gradually he got him used to reality. Once the magician ordered him to raise a flag on a distant summit. The following day, the flag floated on the summit. He tried other analogous experiments, each bolder than the last. With a certain bitterness, he understood that his son was ready to be born—and perhaps impatient. That night, for the first time, he kissed him and sent him to the other temple whose ruins whitened downstream, many inextricable leagues of jungle and marsh away. Before he went (so that he would never know that he was a ghost, so that he would think he was like the other men) he infused into him the total oblivion of his years of apprenticeship.

His victory and peace were left clouded with loathsomeness. In the twilight of evening and dawn, he prostrated himself before the stone figure, imagining perhaps that his unreal son was executing identical rites, in other circular ruins, downstream; during the night he did not dream, or he dreamed as all men do. The sounds and forms of the universe seemed pale to him: the missing son fed on those diminutions of his soul. His life's purpose was fulfilled; the man lived on in a sort of ecstasy. At the end of a time which certain narrators of his story prefer to compute in years and others in lustrums, he was awakened at midnight by two rowers: he was not able to see their faces but they spoke to him of a magic man in a Northern temple who was capable of trampling on fire and not burning himself. Abruptly, the magician remembered the words of the god. He remembered that of all the creatures that form the sphere, fire was the only one who knew that his son was a ghost. Remembering that, he was pacified, then tormented. He feared that his son might ponder on that abnormal privilege and in some way discover his merely ghostly

condition. Not to be a man, to be the projection of another man's dream—what an incomparable humiliation, what an aberration! Every father is interested in the sons that he has generated (that he has permitted) in a moment of confusion or happiness; it is natural that the magician feared for the future of that son, plotted entrapment by entrapment and, during a thousand and one secret nights.

His trepidations abruptly came to an end, but this was foreseen by several signs. First (at the end of a long drought) a remote cloud on a hill, light as a bird; then, to the South, sky that was the pink color of leopard's gums; then a lot of smoke rusting the night's metal; then the beasts' panic-stricken flight. Because that which happened many centuries ago was repeated. The ruins of the god of fire's sanctuary were destroyed by the fire. In a birdless dawn the magician saw the concentric fire slither against the walls. For a second, he thought of taking refuge in the water but then he understood that death was coming to crown his old age and to absolve him of his labors. He walked against the pennants of fire. These did not bite his flesh, they caressed him and overflowed him with heat or combustion. Relieved, humiliated, terrified, he understood that he also was an appearance, that somebody else was dreaming him.

Translated by Mary Wells

RUBIO Y MORENA

Tennessee Williams

THE WRITER KAMROWSKI had many acquaintances, especially now that his name had begun to acquire some public lustre, and he also had a few friends which he had kept over the years the way that you keep a few books you have read several times but are still not willing to part with. He was essentially a lonely man, not self-sufficient but living as though he were. He had never been able to believe that anybody sincerely cared much about him and perhaps no one did. When women treated him tenderly, which sometimes happened in spite of his reserve, he suspected them of trying to pull the wool over his eyes. He was not at ease with them. It even embarrassed him to sit across from a woman at a restaurant table. He could not return her look across the table nor keep his mind on the bright things she was saying. If she happened to wear an ornament at her throat or on the lapel of her jacket he would keep his eyes on this pin and stare at it so intently that finally she would interrupt her talk to ask him why he found it so fascinating or might even unfasten it from her dress and hand it across the table for closer inspection. When going to bed with a woman, desire would often desert his body as soon as he put off his clothes and exposed his nakedness to her. He felt her eyes on him, watching, knowing, involving, and the desire ran out of him like water, leaving him motionless as a dead body on the bed beside her, impervious to her caresses and burning with shame, repulsing her almost roughly if she persisted in trying to waken his passion. But when she had given up trying, when she had finally turned away from his unresponsive body and fallen asleep, then he would turn slowly warm with desire, not shame, and begin to approach the woman until with a moan of longing, greater than even his fear of her had been, he would rouse her from sleep with the brutal haste of a bull in loveless coupling. It

was not the kind of lovemaking that women respond to with much understanding. There was no tenderness in it, neither before nor after the act was completed, with the frigid embarrassment first and the satiety afterwards, both making him rough and coarse and nearly speechless. He thought of himself as being no good with women, and for that reason his relations with them had been infrequent and fleeting. It was a kind of psychic impotence of which he was bitterly ashamed. He felt it could not be explained so he never tried to explain it. And so he was lonely and unsatisfied outside of his work. He was uniformly kind to everybody just because he found it easier to be that way, but he forgot nearly all of his social engagements, or if he happened to remember one while he was working, he would sigh, not very deeply, and go on working without even stopping to call on the phone and say, Excuse me, I'm working. His attachment to his work was really somewhat absurd for he was not an especially good writer. In fact he was nearly as awkward in his writing as he had been in his relations with women. He wrote the way that he had always made love, with a feeling of apprehension, rushing through it blindly and feverishly as if he were fearful of being unable to complete the act.

You may be wondering why you are presented with these unpleasantly clinical details in advance of the story. It is in order to make more understandable the relationship which the story deals with, a rather singular relationship between the writer Kamrowski and a Mexican girl, Amada, which began in the Mexican border town of Laredo, one summer during the war when Kamrowski was returning from a trip through the Mexican interior.

Because of his suspiciously foreign name and appearance and a nervous habit of speech that easily gave the impression of an accent, Kamrowski had been detained at the border by customs and immigration officials. They had confiscated his papers for an examination by experts in code, and Kamrowski had been forced to remain in Laredo while this examination was in progress. He had taken a room at the Texas Star Hotel. It was intensely hot, the night he spent there. He lay on the huge sagging deck of the bed and smoked cigarettes. Because it was such a hot night he lay there naked with the windows open and the door open, too, hoping to make a draught of air on his body. The room was quite dark except for his cigarette and the corridor of the hotel was almost lightless. About three A.M. a figure appeared in the doorway. It was so tall that he took it to be a man. He said nothing

but went on smoking and the figure in the doorway appeared to be staring at him. He had heard things about the deportment of guests at the Texas Star Hotel and so he was not surprised when the door pushed further open and the figure came in and advanced to the edge of the bed. It was only when the head inclined over him and the heavy black hair came tumbling over his bare flesh that he realized the figure to be a woman's. No, he said, but the caller paid no attention and after a while Kamrowski was reconciled to it. Then pleased and, at last, delighted. The meeting had been so successful that in the morning Kamrowski had kept her with him. He asked her no questions. She asked him none. They simply went off together, and seemingly it did not matter where they went. . .

For a few months Kamrowski and the Mexican girl named Amada, had traveled around the southern states in a rattle-trap car held together by spit and a prayer, and most of that time the girl sat mutely beside him while he thought his own thoughts. What her thoughts were he had not the least idea and not much concern. He only saw her turn her head once and that was when they were passing down the main street of a little town in Louisiana. He turned to see what she looked at. A gaudily dressed negro girl stood on a street-corner in a cluster of roughly dressed white men. Amada smiled faintly and nodded. *Putana*, she said, only that: but the faint smile of recognition remained on her face for quite a while after the corner had slipped out of sight. She did not often smile and that was why the occurrence had stuck in his mind.

Companionship was not a familiar or easy thing for Kamrowski, not even the companionship of men. The girl was the first he had lived with at all continuously, and to his content he found it possible to forget her presence except as some almost abstract comfort like that of warmth or of sleep. Sometimes he would feel a little astonished, a little incredulous over this sudden alliance of theirs, this accidental coming together of their two so different lives. Sometimes he wondered just why he had taken her with him and he could not explain this thing to himself and yet he did not regret it. He had not realized, at first, what a curious-looking person she was, not until other people had noticed it for him. Sometimes when they stopped at a filling-station or entered a restaurant at night, he would notice the way strangers looked at her with a sort of amused surprise, and then he would look at her too, and he, too, would be amused and surprised at the strangeness of her appearance. She was tall and narrow-shouldered and

most of the flesh of her body was centered about the hips which were as large as the rump of a horse. Her hands were large as a man's but not capable. Their movements were too nervous and her feet clopped awkwardly around. She was forever stumbling or getting caught on something because of her ungainly size and motions. Once the sleeve of her jacket got caught in the slammed car door and instead of quietly opening the door and disengaging the caught sleeve she began to utter short, whimpering cries and to tug at the caught sleeve till the material gave way and a piece of sleeve tore loose. Afterwards he noticed that her whole body was shaking as if she had just passed through some nervous ordeal and throughout their supper at the hotel café she would keep lifting up the torn sleeve and frowning at it with a mystified expression as if she did not understand how it got that way: then glancing at him with her head slightly tilted in a look of inquiry as if to ask him if he understood what had happened to the torn sleeve. After the supper, when they had gone upstairs she took out a pair of scissors and cut the sleeve neatly across to give it an edge. He pointed out to her that this made a disparity between the lengths of the two sleeves. Ha ha, said the girl. She held the jacket up to the light. She saw the disparity herself and began to laugh at it. Finally she threw the jacket into the waste-paper basket and she lay down on the bed with a copy of a movie-magazine. She thumbed through it rapidly till she came to a picture of a young male star on a beach. She stopped at that page. She drew the magazine close to her eyes and stared at it with her large mouth hanging open for half an hour while Kamrowski lay on the bed beside her, only comfortably, warmly half-conscious of her until before sleep, as peacefully as he would sleep, he turned to embrace her.

Kamrowski had grown to love her. Unfortunately he was even less articulate in speaking about such things than he would have been in trying to write about them. He could not make the girl understand the tenderness he felt toward her. He was not a man who could even say, I love you. The words would not come off his tongue, not even in the intimacies of the night. He could only speak with his body and his hands. With her child-like mind, the girl must have found him altogether baffling. She could not have been able to believe that he loved her but she must have been equally unable to fathom his reason for staying with her if he did not. Kamrowski would never know how she explained these things to herself or if she tried to explain them or if she was really as mindless as she had seemed: not looking for reasons for

things but only accepting that which happens to be as simply being. No. He would never know how. The dark figure in the doorway of the hotel, even mistaken at first for that of a man, did not come into the light. It remained in shadow. *Morena*. She called him *Rubio* sometimes when she touched him. *Rubio* meant blond one. Sometimes he would answer *Morena* which means dark. *Morena*. That's all she was. Something dark. Dark of skin, dark of hair, dark of eyes. But mystery can be loved as well as knowledge and there could be little doubt that Kamrowski loved her.

Nevertheless a change became evident after they had lived together for less than a year, which may not seem a long time but was actually a relationship of unprecedented duration in the life of Kamrowski. This change seemed to have several reasons, but perhaps the real one was none of those apparent. For one thing the presence of women had ceased to disturb him so greatly. That nervous block described in the beginning was now so thoroughly dissolved by virtue of the effortless association with Amada, that his libido had now begun to ask for an extended field of play. The mind of a woman no longer emasculated him. The simple half-Indian girl had restored his male dominance. In his heart he knew this and was grateful but one does not always return a gift with an outward show of *devoir*. He paid her back very badly. That winter season, which they spent in a southern city, he began to go out in society for the first time in his life, for he had lately become what is called a Name and received a good deal of attention. It was possible, now, to ignore the ornament at the throat of the woman and return, at least now and again, the look of her eyes without too much mortification. It was also possible to make amatory advances before she had gone to sleep.

That winter Kamrowski began to form other attachments of more than a night's duration, one in particular with a young woman who was also a writer and a member of the urban intelligentsia. She had, alas, one defect. She wore contact lenses which she used to remove before going to bed and Kamrowski had to ask her not to put them on the table beside the bed in the little drawer of the table. But this was an unimportant item in the affair which went along smoothly. He began to make love to this girl, Ida, more regularly than he made love to Amada. Now when Amada would turn to him on the bed, he would often avert himself from her and pretend to be sleeping. He would hear her beginning to cry beside him. Her hand would move enquiringly down his body, and once he seized her hand and slammed it

roughly away from him. Then she got out of bed. He got up, too, and went into the kitchen and sat there with a pitcher of ice-water. He heard her packing her things as she had done often before. Her trunk was a military locker. The bottom of it was filled with random keepsakes such as restaurant menus, pictures of actors torn from movie magazines, post-cards from all the places they had visited in their travels. Sometimes while she was packing she would stalk into the kitchen, holding up some article such as a towel that she had filched from a hotel bathroom. Is this yours or mine? she would ask. He would shrug. She would make a terrible face at him and return to the bedroom to continue her packing. He knew that she would unpack everything in the morning. In the morning she would restore the souvenir menus and post-cards to their places about the mirror and the mantel because without him there was no place for her to go and no one to go with. He did not want to feel sorry for her. He was enjoying himself too much to allow a shadow of contrition to weigh upon him too heavily, and so he would think to himself, for self-exoneration during such scenes. She was only a whore in a third-class hotel where I found her. Why isn't she happy? Well, I don't give a damn!

And yet he was very glad, when he had finished drinking the pitcher of ice-water, to find that she was no longer packing but had gone back to bed. Then he would make love to her more tenderly than he had for many weeks past.

It was a morning after an incident such as this that Kamrowski first discovered that the girl had begun to steal from him. Thereafter whenever he put on his clothes in the morning he would find his pockets lighter of money than they had been before. At first she took only silver, but as the earnings of his novel increased she began to increase the amounts of her thefts, taking one dollar bills, then five and ten dollar bills. Finally Kamrowski had to accuse her of it. She wailed miserably but she did not deny it. For about a week the practice was suspended. Then it started again, first with the silver, increasing again to bills of larger denomination. He tried to thwart her by taking the money out of his pockets and hiding it somewhere about the apartment. But when he did this she would waken him in the night by her slow and systematic search for it. What are you looking for? he would ask the girl. I am looking for matches, she'd tell him. So at last he humored her in it. He only cashed small checks and let her steal what she wanted. It remained a mystery to him what she did with the money. She apparently bought nothing with it and

yet it did not seem to linger in her possession. What did she want with it? She had everything that she needed or seemed to wish. Perhaps it was simply her way of paying him back for the infidelities which he was now practicing all the time.

It was late that winter of their residence in the large southern city that the ill health of Amada became apparent. She did not speak of her suffering, but she would sometimes get up in the night and light a holy candle in a transparent red glass cup. She would crouch beside it mumbling Spanish prayers with a hand pressed to her side where some pain was located. It made her furious when he got up or questioned her about it. She behaved as if she were suffering from some disgraceful secret. Mind your own business, she would snarl back at him if he asked, What is it? Hours later she would waken him again, crawling back into bed with an exhausted sigh which told him that the attack of pain had subsided. Then moved by pity he would turn to her slowly and press her to him as gently as possible so that his pressure wouldn't renew the pain. She would not go to a doctor. She said she had been to a doctor a long time ago and that he had told her she had a disease of the kidneys the same as her father had had and that there was nothing to do but try to forget it. It doesn't matter, she said, I am going to forget it.

She made an elaborate effort to conceal the attacks as they became more frequent and more severe, thinking perhaps that her illness would disgust him and he might forsake her completely. She would steal out of bed so cautiously that it would take her five or ten minutes to disengage herself from the covers and creep to the chair in the corner, and if she lit the prayer-candle, she would crouch over it with cupped hands to conceal the flame. It was evident to Kamrowski that the infection in her body, whatever it was, was now passing from a chronic into an acute stage. He would have been more concerned if he had not just then started to work on another novel. The girl Amada began to exist for him on the other side of a center which was his writing. Everything outside of that existed in a penumbra as shadowy forms on the further side of a flame. Days and events were uncertain. The ringing of the door bell and the telephone was ignored. Eating became irregular. He slept with his clothes on, sometimes in the chair where he worked. His hair grew long as a hermit's. He grew a beard and mustache. A lunatic brightness appeared in his eyes while his ordinarily smooth face acquired hollows and promontories and his hands shook. He had fits of coughing and palpitations of the heart which sometimes made

him think he was dying and greatly speeded up his already furious tempo of composition.

Afterwards he could not remember clearly how things had been between himself and Amada during this feverish time. He ceased to make love to her, he ceased that altogether, and he was only dimly aware of her presence in the apartment. He gave her commands as if she were a servant and she obeyed them quickly and wordlessly with an air of fright. Get me coffee! he would suddenly yell at her. Play that record again, he would say, with a jerk of his thumb at the victrola. But he was not conscious of her except as a creature to carry out such commissions.

During this interval she had quit stealing his money. Most of the day she would sit at the opposite end of the wide front room in which he was working. As long as she stayed at that end of the room her presence did not distract him from his work, but if she entered unbidden his half of the room or if she asked him some question, he would yell at her furiously or even hurl a book at her. She became very quiet. When she went to the kitchen or bathroom, she would move one foot at a time, slowly and stealthily, gazing back at him to make sure he had no objection. Her face had changed, too, in the same way that his had changed. The long equine face had become even bonier than before and dreadfully sallow and the eyes now glittered as if they looked into a room where a great light was. She moved about with an odd stateliness which must have come from the suffering caused by the movement. One hand was now always pressed to the side that hurt her and she moved with exaggerated uprightness in defiance of the temptation to ease her discomfort by crouching. These details of her appearance he could not have noticed at the time, not consciously, and yet they came to him vividly in recollection. It was only afterwards, too, that he troubled himself to wonder how she might have interpreted this disastrous change in their way of living together. She must have thought that all affectionate feeling for her was gone and that he was now enduring her company out of pity only. She stopped stealing his money at night. For a month she sat in the corner and watched him, watched him with the dumb, wanting look of an animal in pain. Occasionally she would dare to cross the room. When he seemed to be resting from his labor, she would come to his side and run her fingers enquiringly down his body to see if he desired her, and finding out that he didn't, she would retire again speechlessly to her side of the room.

Then all at once she left him. He had spent a night out with his new blond mistress and returned to find that Amada had

packed her locker-trunk and removed it from the apartment, this time in grim earnest. He made no attempt to find her. He believed that she would necessarily return of her own accord, for he could not imagine her being able to do otherwise. But she did not return to him, as the days passed, nor did any word of her reach him. He was not certain how he felt about this. He thought for a while that he might even be somewhat relieved by the resulting simplification of his life and the absence of that faint odor of disease which had lately hung sadly over the bed they had slept in. There was still always the book, sometimes loosening its grip now that the first draft was finished, but still making him insensible as a paranoiac to everyday life. During the intervals when the work dropped off, when there was discouragement or a stop for reflection, Kamrowski would take to the streets and follow strange women. He glutted his appetite with a succession of women and continually widened the latitude of his experience, till, all at once, he was filled with disgust at himself and the circus-trapeze of longing on which he had kicked himself senselessly back and forth since the flight of the girl he had lived with. He didn't want any more of that now or ever.

And so one night, about five months after their separation, the image of Amada stalked with a sound of trumpets through the midnight walls of his apartment. She stood like some apparition of flame at the foot of his bed, all luminous from within as an X-ray picture. He saw the tall white bones of her standing there, and he sat bolt-upright in the sweat-dampened covers and gave a loud cry: then he fell back on his face to weep uncontrollably till the coming of morning. When daylight was coming, even before the windows had turned really white, he rose to pack his valise and arrange for the trip to Laredo, to find the lost girl and bring her back into the empty room in his heart. He assumed without thinking that Laredo was where she would be, because it was where he had found her.

He was not wrong about that. She had returned to Laredo five months ago but not to the Texas Star where he had found her. The manager of the hotel pretended to have no knowledge of the girl but the Mexican porter told him that he would find her in the home of her family on the outskirts of town, in a house without number on a street without name, at the bottom of a steep hill on which stood an ice-plant.

When Kamrowski arrived at the door of the gray wooden house to which these directions took him—a building no more than a shack which leaned exhaustedly on the edge of a steep

and irregular road of grey dust—all of the female family came to the door and talked excitedly among themselves, brushing him avidly up and down with their eyes, half smiling and half snarling at him like a pack of wild dogs. They seemed to be arguing almost hysterically among themselves as to whether or not this stranger should be admitted. He was so sick with longing to see the lost girl that he could not bring out the little Spanish he knew. All he could say was Amada, more and more loudly. And then all at once, from some recess of the building, a loud, hoarse voice was lifted like the crow of a cock. It had a ring of anger but the word called out was the affectionate name she used to call him. Rubio, which meant blond. He swept past the women, brushing them aside with both arms, and made for the direction from which the fierce call had come. He fairly hurled himself against the warped door and broke into a room which was all dark except for a vigil light in a red glass cup. He looked that way where the light in the glass cup was. There he saw her. She was lying upon a pallet arranged upon the bare floor.

It was impossible to judge her appearance in the windowless room, a sort of storage closet, with that one candle burning, especially since he had just come in from the glare of a desert sunset. He made out, gradually, that she was wearing a man's undershirt and he noticed how big her hands and her elbows were now that the arms were so emaciated, and her head seemed almost as big as the head of a horse and the familiar, coarse hair was hanging like a horse's mane about her scrawny neck and shoulders. His first emotion was fury as well as pity. What does this mean, what are you doing in here, he cried out fiercely. Mind your own business, she yelled back at him, exactly as if they had never been separated. Then he swallowed his rage at her family, still going on with their high-pitched argument beyond the door he had slammed shut. He crouched on his haunches beside the pallet and took hold of her hand. She tugged away from his grasp but not quite strongly enough to break it. She seemed to be trying to seem more alive than she was. She did not let herself entirely back down on the pallet, although he could see it was an effort for her to remain propped up on her elbow. And she did not allow her voice to drop but kept it at the same loud and harsh pitch. She did not remove her eyes from his face which she seemed to be straining to examine, but she did not return his look directly. She seemed to be staring at his nose or his mouth. There was a great bewilderment in her look, a wonder at his being there, at his coming to see her. She asked him several

times. What are you doing here in Laredo? And his answer, I came here to see you, did not seem to satisfy her. At last he leaned over and touched her shoulder and said, You ought to lie back. She glared at him fiercely. I am all right, she said. Her dark eyes were now immense. All of the light that came from the ruby glass cup was absorbed in those eyes and magnified into a beam that shot into his heart and deprived that moon-like organ of all its shadows, exposing in brutal relief the barrenness of it the way that the moon's landscape, with the sun full on it, turns into a hard and flat disk whose light is borrowed. He could not endure it. He sprang from beside the pallet. He dug in his pocket and pulled out a handfull of bills. Take these, he whispered hoarsely. He tried to stuff them into her hands. I don't want your money, she answered. Then after a slight pause she muttered, Give it to them. She jerked her head toward the door beyond which the family were now preparing noisily for supper. He felt defeated altogether. He sighed and looked down at his hands. Her own hands lifted, then, and reached falteringly toward his head. Rubio, she whispered, the word for blond. Tiredly one of her hands dropped down his body to see if he desired her, and discovering that he did not, she smiled at him sadly and let her eyes fall shut. She seemed to be falling asleep; so then he leaned over and kissed her gently at the edge of her large mouth. Morena, he whispered, which was the word for dark one. Instantly the long bony arms flung about him an embrace which took his breath. She pressed their faces painfully together, her Indian cheekbones bruising his softer flesh. Scalding tears and the pressure of those gaunt arms broke finally all the way through the encrusted shell of his ego, which had never before been broken all the way through, and he was released. He was let out of the small but apparently rather light and comfortable room of his known self into a space that lacked the comfort of limits. He entered a space of bewildering dark and immensity, and yet not dark, of which light is really the darker side of the sphere. He was not at home in it. It gave him unbearable fright, and so he crawled back. He crawled back out of the gaunt embrace of the girl. I will come back in the morning, he said to the girl as he rose from beside the pallet and crawled back into the small room he was secure in. . .

When he returned in the morning, the atmosphere of his reception was different. There was an air of excitement in the place that he could not fathom, and all of the women seemed to have on their best clothes. He thought perhaps it was because of the money that he had left in the sick-room. He started to cross to

that room, but the old woman plucked his sleeve and pointed toward another. She led him into the parlor of the house and he was astonished to find that they had moved the girl there. Because he did not understand their speech, he could not realize at first that she had died in the night: this he did not realize until he had picked up her hand, nearly as dark as a negro's, and found it cool and stiffened. They had dressed her in white, a night-gown of clean white linen that shone with starch, and when he released the hand, the o'dest woman advanced and placed it carefully back in its former position on the flat bosom.

He noticed also that the odor of sickness was gone, or possibly lost in the odor of burning wax, for a great many candles had been brought into the room and set in ruby glass cups on the window ledges. The blinds had been lowered against the meridian glare of the flat desert country, but the glare filtered through pin-point perforations in the old fabric so that each blind was like a square of green sky with stars shining in it. The mourners assembled there were mostly neighbors' children, the smallest ones naked, the larger dressed in grey rags. One little girl was holding a home-made doll, roughly cut out of wood and painted into a grotesque semblance of human infancy. Coarse black hair had been attached to the head. It seemed somehow like an effigy of the dead girl. Unable to look upon the actual face and its now intolerable mystery, Kamrowski stole to the side of the half-naked child and gently and timidly thrust his hand toward the doll. He touched the coarse black hair of the doll with a finger. The child complained faintly and hugged the doll closer to her. Kamrowski began to tremble. He felt that his hand must keep in touch with the doll. He must not let the child move away with her precious possession, and so with one hand he stroked the head of the child while with the other hand's finger he kept in touch with the familiar black hair. But still the child edged away, withdrawing from his caress and regarding him with huge distrustful brown eyes.

Meanwhile a whispered consultation seemed to be going on among the women. It grew louder with excitement and finally the grandmother, with an abrupt decision, separated herself from the group and approached Kamrowski and cried out to him in English, Where is Amada's money, where is her money?

He stared at the old woman stupidly. What money? She made a fierce spitting noise as she thrust toward him a handful of yellow papers. He looked down at them. They seemed to be telegraph forms. Yes, they were all money-orders, sent from the

city in which he had lived with Amada. The sums were those she had stolen at night from his pockets.

Kamrowski looked wildly about for a way to escape. The women were closing about him like a wolf-pack, now all jabbering at once. He made for the outer door. Beside the door the little girl with the doll appeared to him dimly. Impulsively he reached out and snatched the doll from the child as he ran past her, into the dusty brilliance of the road. He ran as fast as he could up the steep and irregular dirt road with the wailing child running behind him, feeling only a need of hanging onto the child's grotesque play-thing till he was alone somewhere and able to cry.

THREE POEMS

Tennessee Williams

THE SOFT CITY

I

Eastward the city with scarcely even a murmur
turns in the soft dusk,

And the soft air-breathers,
their soft bosoms rising and falling as ferns under water
responding to some impalpably soft pressure,
turn with the city,

The petals of tenderness in them,
their tentative ways of feeling, not quite reaching out
but ever so gently half reaching out and withdrawing,

Withdrawing to where their feminine star is withdrawing,
the planet that turns with them,
faithfully always and softly. . .

II

And if there is something which is not soft in the city,
such as a cry too hard for the soft mouth to hold,

God puts a soft stop to it.

Bending invisibly down, He breathes a narcosis
over the panicky face upturned to entreat Him:
a word as soft as *morphine* is the word that God uses,
placing His soft hand over the mouth of the crier
before it has time to gather the force of a cry—

It is almost as if no cry had ever been thought of. . .

III

Eastward the city with scarcely even a murmur
turns in the soft dusk.

The lights of it blur,
the delicate spires are unequal
as if the emollient dusk had begun to dissolve them

And, yes, over all,
soft canopy over soft canopy,
web over soft, soft web,
gauze hung over gauze,

The mysteries of the tall heaven,
the tall and very soft heaven, yes,
softest of all!

Morocco, January, 1949

COUNSEL

I

Ask at the door for the man whose name I gave you.
You will probably find him sitting behind a newspaper
under a skylight that translates all weathers and hours
into late winter dusk.

His contempt means nothing,
for satiety has made him a eunuch,
and the glance that he gives you will come from behind the glass
wall of a dirty aquarium.

His wife is another strange fish, perpetually agitating the
grey straws of a broom among a circular litter that travels
nowhere.

I think I had better advise you not to allow this lady to
conduct you upstairs upon the false excuse that her husband
is busy.

Her hot mouth exhales the steaming damp of a necropolis,
but what's more important is her legerdemain.

While one hand diverts you obscenely, its more practical sister
wanders rapidly in and out of your pockets. . .

Tip her extravagantly,
not to secure her good will, since she doesn't have
any,
but a thousand francs will immobilize her fingers. . .

Jacques will present you with a little grey napkin,
freshly ironed but not laundered,
and a key that looks as if it belonged to the forbidden closet of
Bluebeard.

Those items are not important.

The candle is!

II

The candle is.

Its fitful illumination will see you into the future,
partially, not completely,
but moments pass that way, and existence is moments'
passage. . .

The stairs are windy.

Even the trembling of the hand that holds it is sufficient to blow
the flame out,
and one must consider, before it's too late to consider,

The phenomena of light, and the perishability of it.

The phenomena of dark are sensible to the insensible only.

The non-phenomena of a mineral existence have an opposite
lustre,

the sort that a coal-bin has where no light is admitted:
they have a contrary weight and magnitude without measure,
which is inimical to us.

Call it, if you will, *terra incognita*—

but don't explore it until the command is issued. . .

I take this liberty, though: to remind you once more that
by some accident which is bewildering to God

Our roots are lodged

in a barely visible crevice among those immensities of black stone that groan like the sea with their own oppressive non-being, groan like a woman too old and dry for child-bearing, yet swollen with child by a man detestable to her, a child that is lifeless, a foetus of stone that grows in a belly of stone, in a body of stone that endures without will of endurance:

the stone is more ponderous than the stone that bears it!
But light again, yes, the candle,
exults in its being. . .

Curve about it your palm,
and if there's a mirror,
where often there is, at a certain turn of the stairs,
don't look!

Don't think of how your face has disappeared into the tissue it's made of,
for reality is a question that nobody asks any more.

III

Now take your time about selecting the girl
since most disappointments come from choosing too quickly.

I would advise you to sit down and order some wine.
It's bad and expensive, but you don't have to drink it,
and the time it allows for inspecting the girls is worth it.

If twelve are present, easily five will be dogs,
and the light is tricky,
but feels are permissible if there's suspicion of padding.

The eager beavers are almost always the dogs, that's something to go by, and personally I always flash my pocket lamp on the ones in the corners that don't seem to know how they got there,
obscurity being, at times, the velvet box of a pearl. . .

Jacques can be helpful, if he's inclined to be helpful,
and a thousand francs can produce that inclination far more speedily than the honest look in your eyes.

Mais soyez tranquille! Take your time!

And then, when you're ready,
nod to the girl you've selected: slip out, and she'll follow.

Caress her thighs as she guides you.

Let her do the opening, that's her business,
but say that the number is lucky, even if it's thirteen,
for superstition's a kind of esperanto. . .

Oh, yes, something else which I had almost forgotten!

It is better not to turn the light on until you have
lowered the torn green blind,
and even then it is sometimes better not to,
for the roses on the wallpaper cannot bear remembrance,
nor can that almost invariable lithograph
of Hope blindfolded with hands on a broken-stringed
lyre.

IV

Now I don't suppose, since we are men of the world,
that it will be necessary for me to advise you against
the errors of adolescence,

among which is, first,
a romantic pity of self
which takes the form of crocodile weeping for others.

Don't impose on your own credulity, baby!

The obituary column is really only an infinite number of
variations upon the theme of your own eventual demise,
and that's exactly why you skip past it so briskly
enroute to reports upon more fashionable doings.

So here's the answer to all her lamentations: *Ho-hum!*
And *don't* attempt to explain your neurosis to her,

If you fall in default upon the demands of her flesh,
the convex being always a form of compulsion,

Don't blame the girl for it!

(A nasty temper's a worse mistake than compassion)

And you must remember that it is certainly not to
her personal advantage for any patron to leave her without
satisfaction.

V

Now understand this!

I'm not a shill or a pimp,

I don't get a cut from the house.
You asked me where you could go, I gave you this address,
but I don't give a God damn whether you go there or not.

All I'm doing's informing you of its existence.

Is that understood?
Okay!

(Sometimes a rubber breaks or a place is raided, and the guy that
you sent there holds you responsible for it,
HA HA!)

So finally what?

Uh-huh. I know what you mean.
It's always as if something hadn't quite happened
between us, but what can you do?
What's true, what's false,
when the heart's an old fake of a Gypsy squinting at tea-leaves!

We shake hands at parting,
the valedictory phrase is *Au Revoir*,
but after my hand has left yours,
I place it tenderly back in my own dark pocket. . .

Paris, May, 1949

THE EYES

The eyes are last to go out.
They remain long after the face has disappeared regretfully into
the tissue that it is made of.
The tongue says goodbye when the eyes have a lingering silence,
for they are the searchers last to abandon the search,
like the woman that stays where the drowned have been washed
ashore after the lanterns staying, not saying goodbye. . .

The eyes have no faith in that too accessible language.
For them no occasion is simple enough for a word to justify it.
Existence in time, not only their own but ancestral,
encloses each moment in four walls of mirrors.

Closed, they are waiting. Open, they're also waiting.
They are acquainted, of course,
but they have forgotten the name of their acquaintance.

Youth is their uneasy bird, and shadows clearer than light
pass through them at times,
Waters are not more changeable under skies
or stones under rapids.

The eyes may be steady with that Athenian look
that answers terror with stillness, or they may be quick
with a purely infatuate being. Almost always
the eyes hold onto an image
Of someone recently departed or gone a long time ago
or only expected. . .

The eyes are not lucky.
They seem to be hopelessly inclined to linger,

They make additions that come to no final sum.
It is really hard to say if their dark is worse than their light,
their discoveries worse than not knowing,

But they are last to go out,
and their going out is always when they are lifted.

Rome, August, 1949

SIX POEMS

Stanley Moss

DEATH IN PARIS

We know only our actions and our sleep
In a country where the children weep
For parents who are dead. To watch we must
Hold a pose, always learn, for we distrust
The weaker stance; we must among the poor
Observe their suffering near ourselves, tour
The galleries of the Louvre, before we stand
Among our buildings with our souls in hand,
Impoverishing the present with our ends,
For no one gives; alone the torturer lends.

As is the risk with love, love extends;
When lovers' needs are one, one love depends,
For quick as burning straw our thoughts succumb
To brief desires the winds in coldness drum
Upon cold trees, and the larger embrace
Becomes the small, and thinking is a place
To go, because the sun will not dry the sea,
And I may love, but you may love to be
In dying gardens where the dying meet,
Though I may be wandering on a street

Where nothing remains but the quick defeat,
Where your eyes darkly seek the stars for heat
In empty mirrors that mark the striking hour
In empty rooms. On highways dogs devour
Pain, stalking hope back to an aimless night
Of buyers and sellers in dancehall light.

We masque with looks of love deceiving,
Our memories grown old, drag the sea weaving
Great shells, amid shrieking gulls, and word
Each object of regret, as screams once heard,

Forgotten in the brass delays. One bird
Separates in a wilderness. A stilled herd
Moves slowly as a hand, and political man
Unloved, denies, discovers his plan,
Reflects: we are placed as stones, our skin torn
Souls allow the seasons, as man, the first born
Hour in a wasted day, gives love to sell
And works to hide, hides desire where he dwells,
With fears of questions, and the separate room;
Love needs love dying, rejects the tomb.

We live, without a color, as a cold bloom
Breathing, breathing till one blossom and doom
Cast spring upon the ground and open wide
Her thighs from dawn till night, till she can't hide
The moaning of her breasts and lips, still seas forth-
Splash night across her in his arms, till North
Leaves flowers, and dead children can not weep
Their dead lives, and beauty is just sleep.
Love and all we will never see or be,
Rests on this shore, then softly drifts out to sea.

(Nowhere tending the white graves, the clown,
So high upon a mountain you can't see up or down.)
Let me begin, if I could begin,-now,
If you or conscience would allow the vow,
I could bring you clear water from the sea
And say I bring you not a part of me,
But the beauty I can in a day observe,
Some useless gift or evening's curve,
These words, all things that disappear in space,
Before tipping the sunlight on your face,
I bring you the things I can't forget,
Though now we kiss, (perhaps we have not met).

Since days become as sounds within the night,
Whatever gives love permanence is right.
What part of reason is left behind?

Does fear clarify necessity and kind?
We've lived in a circle of the missing,
Of physical time, and emotional time, and kissing;
So terror leaves us to calculate,
A segment of our mood, the date,
How history has flung events upon the floor,
What the coroners of time deplore:
Our souls, our labors, the declined roulette
Of buying, selling, murder, and the sign "to let."

Paris, October, 1948

POEM

The hoping of our lives is death to speak;
Oh God and children and all things now unreal,
What does the brightness of the sun conceal?
Beauty lies exhausted and hot skies shriek,
The idiot highways up and down a hill,
Are not so still, as we who live by will.

Our dulled hands must hold roundness to the earth,
And scrape with flat claws at time's decay;
We create mornings and destroy a day,
And sail fast seas and hide the fields in birth
Among the seasons and a frightened day;
The sun breaks, and the winds blow winds away.

I do not want within my life to look,
Nor mark the prisms of my life with light.
How frightened were your kisses in the night,
How gentle was your yearning that I took,
And when you left there was no tolling bell,
There were no secrets left we could not tell.

A violent star may kill but can't compel
A star. We sing to thoughts. We can not see.
We have seen the dark and know the dark must be
Within the shadows where the sunlight fell.
No one sees frozen lakes begin to melt,
We feel and slowly feeling is not felt.

HOW SUDDENLY EXHAUSTED

How suddenly exhausted, clinged and empty as shells broken.
How is where, is nowhere.
Nothing left.
Yet like a fire just out,
We could soar again through forest,
But for a breath of air.

We can get on a train
Leave every face we have known
To go to a hotel register,
Accept the name of the first name in the directory,
Would be called that name. We could be known as anyone,—
Shall we do this in a form
Listening to our words?

How suddenly exhausted, clinged, and empty as shells broken.
Peering under rocks and covers, for our lovers;
The atom bomb and the stock exchange and subway showers,
Kiss them all as you would kiss your darling's breast,
And the rest. We love what we are most with; we are these,
Our myths, filed away in drawers of Dupont and tanks of Shell.
Tell and tell me darling that you love me like a breeze,
That you will give me yesterday and today all I please,
As you please. That we can sing like Mozart arias, in a cell
Among the trees, and sit looking at one another,
Though the gentle may more gently smother,
From time to time we love no other,
So little is left of time's thin cover
Or of rhymes.

We are what we believe, though we make believe
And can not often grin, we are as water falling
In laughter at summer falling after.
So in haste we often sin.
Thinking what is right,
What do I want.
What's on tonight?
We hunt.
Until one day, someplace, anywhere,

As weather,
 (Since we care),
 We have smoothed a stone,
 We live a moment of a poem.

ON CROSSING THE ATLANTIC

This plain of sighs has known the whole concourse
 Of the sun, this second of eternity
 Contained here, to unpray a God, arranged
 By wisdom, an unlit room to stare within,
 And see love scald darling, and work chide death;
 What bodies, what commerce of emotions,
 Have lain their jaws across this graveless sprawl,
 Watering their bones to salt, and their hopes
 Pale, paler, till another midnight burns.

Blue sun darkens the sea with frozen leaves
 As the fierce dawn storm begins, onto itself
 Inflicting its own system and its rage.
 And we so weak, see only reflections
 Of our lives, seek logical requirement
 Of wind worn waves, grasp iron, or rails, or rust,
 Unchurch philosophy, whelp after prayer
 That it leave us unharmed; we watchman's fears,
 Become belief and temperament. O tides,
 We have stood a moment near your roaming
 To chose our small disasters and our plans.

SUNSET

The still herds sleep
 In a day made hollow,
 Go away, weep,
 Darkness can follow.
 Go quick, the wild night chills,
 As flowers fall on hills,
 And the pilgrim rivers pass,
 Washed in cool grass.

Turn from the sky
 Of earth and trees,
 The swallows die
 In caverns of breeze.
 Night enters ocean dreams
 Makes sleep the evening streams,
 Finds men in the silent herds,
 Despite their words.

Like the ancient
 Howling of innocence,
 When trees stand bent,
 Speechless as white tents
 On the wet colored sands;
 The sun drops on these lands
 As evening touches night
 Beyond our sight.

FOR LOVING IS REAL

One thought and we are cut as if by broken glass!
 The wise seas mark a familiar spot.
 Only the sun can lie upon the grass,
 Nothing is enough, whatever is, is not.
 We lie upon our lives and stumble home,
 As stars we fall alone; if cold nights pass
 We moan, leading our souls in humble riot;
 Since once we were now we can not become.
 You are winter, and the sun is like a slum.

Now spring has gone and we are left instead;
 Chance neither made us meet nor separate,
 Since illogical love must die in bed,
 Since night is cold the sun is always late.
 I will not speak of places out of sight,
 Nor ask for things unknown, nor what is dead,
 For loving is real, more real than love or state. . .
 O, if the wise and courageous hold the light,
 Why don't they lie closer in bed at night?

What frozen, broken, windless, eyeless day,
 Has left us to these circles we must solve,

STANLEY MOSS

Counting windows by the sea. Now play
No more. Weeds choke the drowners they involve,
And we emerge as carelessly as light.
Now to speak of next spring and where it moves,
From season to season though love can't stay,
We are as loving is, pain is our sight;
Where do you wake this morning, where shall you go tonight?

It is our nothingness we carve as wood,
(Who dared to make us this, to speak of this?)
Once left no love is understood;
No love is pure, revenge is touch or kiss,
Unless we say, I give you this. We're strange,
(How much can we lose, how much can we miss?)
One death and love's away! I'd love if I could,
Though close as laughter we in haste arrange.
We learn to see the sun at night, and change

.

FOUR POEMS ON A MID-CENTURY THEME

Edwin Honig

I

There are houses in the land where lights
Waste nights away and stains of emptiness
Brown windows in the dawn's first flimsy pall.
There, outside, as though macadam were
A lawn, elastic grackles turn their toes in,
Bob their beaks to blackness, adamant on
Survival, as though the light between the dying
And unborn, the unreplenished waste that falls
Away, could not be all.

By eight light is vigor on the walls.
And everyone in shoes has taken up
A grackle job, has rouged the smile and ground
The tooth to win, though knowing it may be
Glass or rock through worlds of paving where
The seed lies spicy, nut-brown, underneath.
By noon light is trembling in the jaws.
And the eternal engine's wincing breath
Already fogs the glass through which the rigid
Pistons of belief have shown the seed
To be, which can be all.

By four light is barking in the brain.
Pupils blaze and sizzle up like wounded
Neon not quite faded or done. In the rising
Gauge of pity pistons stammer while
The swivelling eyes run glue to any break
Of faith. Though the blackness may be cracked

The coughing engine fires back, plumes
 Itself in smoke, and stalls—which may not be
 Enough, but may be all.

By ten light is daylight's phantom crowned.
 Wide-eyed, shrouded as the corpse of truth,
 It is lord of every nerve's betrayal.
 Where the hours walk all night forgotten,
 It presides with smiles and teeth discarded
 In the hunt, packing sleep with counter-
 Feits of waking when the seed is gone
 Or never under any daylight paving
 Will be found.

This is the dream that films
 The windows, browning every waking when
 The light is dying and in the weakened dawn
 Nothing yet is born but the grackle's beak
 Already working, never shirking—and this,
 This might be all.

II

Fear of the faded fineness falling off,
 The one dream already dreamt that cannot be
 Revisited the rising moment when we
 Turn to the familiar patience of a roof
 And find the ruin, the lintel lapsing, death's
 Fingers in the beams—

These are the lush last hours when gardens
 Talk to thrushes what we cannot hear,
 And they obey, repeat the summons clearly,
 And a sudden tree in all its hair quickens
 Till nothing matters but that gone vibration
 In its slowing hair.

Four seasons, a common year of fables ends.
 And we are squandered by a finger's slip,
 The lordly renter's boast that lit the lip
 This time last year when lawn-wishing friends
 Joked of jungle weed and we swept
 Them up and gardens lifted

Everywhere with "Owned things are quieter."
Now our stare is grass. The clacking audits
Of those days whirl back to pay the boast as
Not we but gardens turn proprietor
To the dim need of rooting longer
Something almost past.

The gardens aren't ours who were loaned
And ownerless. By hours clipped and mown
To the last quick speech, to the blown
Word that touched the thrush, to the cold
Puff that rustled in the tree's crown,
Deprived, possessed, we go.

III

Feebly my love fell through
The spoiling summer

a drooping wing
 Down spiralling amid the glinting silences
 Fell curling
 In glistening gown-long forests
 And like a smoke burrowing
 In all that crowded lonesomeness
 All sound murdering

ah my love's
Swift yearning touched a small parched wing
To all that fine still grown-ness
To catch their training hems
And smokeless
Burst aflame
And soundless
Fired
All the gowns of separate grown-ness
Till forests toppled
Rotting
Smouldering
And from among them

ah my love's
Sweet flame arose like a great wing burning
Beating and burning
All that empty loveless summer's spoiling.

IV

My but the wind sucked my cheeks
The night I grew old
The lullaby wind with blood
In its pounce and knives in its jaws
Went walloping on
And knocked the night cold
And I with my cheeks
Turning blue and gold
And my thirty round years
Fell into its paws
Like a boom
Of surly brown bees
Went rising and falling
And scattered stings
That blistered the moon
And plastered the honey-eyed dawn.

My but the water boiled dry
In my tea-kettle mind
The day I grew old
The water that once tanned
My lip with sugar and scorn
And I rose in an aura of cream
And whistled the thirty loon tunes
Of my wordy lean years
That I was the cloud that roamed
Through an archangel's dream
And swearing I only had use
For the fig or the nut
Who wanted my juice
Though I for no reason at all
Was fed as palavering foam
To a congress of tropical gales.

My but the dirt flew up
Higher than kites
The hour that I grew old
And I with my hoists in a fog
Yo-hoed an earthquaking vow
To bring it to where it belonged
As I in the sheets

Of my patchy work years set out
 As a sail and bellied and blew
 Thirty short chills
 While my burly hot lungs
 Went black with sublime
 Till the dirt flew back in a lump
 And covered me up to the eyes
 That blink blind as stars
 Stuck in a pin-cushion sky.

My but the fire went down
 On its wary white knees
 The minute that I grew old
 And I hunted in all the woods
 For sparks of my thirty tall years
 And found only thirsty old beards
 Whispering Fear the water
 Fool the flame Pay the dirt
 To bully the wind to bellow your fame
 While only the sun gets supper
 And I with my mouth of repeat
 Went chewing the ashes of bone
 Which the sun did not eat
 Till I saw the fire and me
 Go grave as a ghoul
 And swallow our tongues in a bier.

ENVOI

So the moral is old
 As the tailor who clothes
 As old and as clothed am I
 A three-decade man ticking around
 A century split in two
 I'm not in the mode to figure the fault
 But fear the future which served beforehand
 Is lackeying sadly behind.

fragments from OUR LADY OF FLOWERS

Jean Genet

(Editor's Note: These pages from Jean Genet's *Notre Dame des Fleurs*, in the translation of Bernard Frechtmann, are from the English-language edition of the book, published in Paris by Paul Morihien, rue Beaujolais. At the time of this writing the book had not been ruled on by the censors of the Treasury Department and until such action it may presumably be imported to this country by mail without hindrance. We title our selections as "fragments" rather than "excerpts" for the good reason that they are to the whole book as one violin to a symphony orchestra. They cannot possibly give any conception of the full range and power of Genet's achievement, but they are still about all that can be printed here in a book for general circulation without fear of outcry for suppression from the forces of self-styled "decency." These passages tell of incidents in the childhood of Culafroy-Divine, one of the book's chief characters. The boy's name was Culafroy, child of a woman named Ernestine; when he had grown up and entered the pederast underworld his nick-name was "Divine." Genet uses the pronouns more or less interchangeably. The architecture of the book is one of its main wonders. The structure follows no set narrative or time pattern, nor does Genet adhere to a single point of view. There is a rhythm and dynamic of mood which recalls Henry Miller in *Tropic of Cancer*, but Genet is a completely original writer and works his own special miracles. It need hardly be said, but perhaps it should be, that we endorse his genius, not his morals or his subject matter. The reader is referred to a first-rate essay on Genet by Eleanor Clark in *The Partisan Review* for April, 1949.)

IT WAS THEN she again sought out the memory of Alberto (and she found him) and was satisfied with him. He was a good-for-

nothing. The whole village distrusted him. He was tricky, brutal and coarse. The girls made a face when his name was mentioned in their presence, but their nights and sudden escapes during the hard hours of work were occupied with his vigorous thighs, with his heavy hands, which always swelled up his pockets and stroked his flanks, remained motionless or moved gently, with precaution, as he raised the taut or swollen cloth of his pants. His hands were broad and thick, with short fingers, a magnificent thumb, an imposing, massive mound of Venus, those hands of his which hung at his arms like sods. It was on a summer evening that the children, who are the usual bearers of staggering news, informed the village that Alberto was fishing for snakes. "Snake-fisher, that's just what he's fit for," thought the old women. That was one more reason to wish him to the nettles. Some scientists were offering an interesting premium for each reptile that was captured alive. By mistake, while playing, Alberto caught one, delivered it alive, and received the promised premium. Thus was born his new profession, which he liked, and which enraged him against himself. He was neither a superman nor an immoral faun: he was a boy with silly thoughts, though embellished by voluptuousness. He seemed to be in a state of continual delight or continual intoxication. It was inevitable that Culafroy should meet him. It was the summer he wandered along the roads. No sooner did he see the outline of his form in the distance than he understood that the goal and key of his walk were there. Alberto stood motionless at the edge of the road, almost in the rye, as if he were waiting for someone, his two shapely legs spread apart like the Colossus of Rhodes or like the German sentries, so proud and solid under their helmets. Culafroy loved him. As he passed by, brave and indifferent, the lad blushed and lowered his head, while Alberto, a smile on his lips, watched him walk. Let us say he was eighteen years old, and yet Divine recalls him a man.

He returned the next day. Alberto was there, sentinel or statue, on the road, "Hello!" he said, with a smile that twisted his mouth. (This smile was Alberto's particularity, was himself. Anyone could have had or could have acquired the stiffness of his hair, the color of his skin, his walk, but not his smile, and now when Divine seeks the lost Alberto, she wants to paint him upon herself and with her mouth invents his smile. She gives her muscles what she considers the right wrinkling, the one which—she thinks so when she feels her mouth twisting—makes her resemble Alberto, until the day it occurs to her to do it in

front of a mirror and she realizes that her grimaces have no relationship with that laugh which we have already termed star-like.) "Hello!" murmured Culafroy. And that was all they said to each other, but Ernestine was to get used to seeing him desert the slate house. One day: "You want to see my pouch?" Alberto showed a closely woven wicker-basket buckled by a strap. That day it confined only one elegant and angry viper. "Want me to open?" "Oh, no, no, don't open," he said, for he still has, in regard to reptiles, that uncontrollable repulsion. Alberto did not lift the cover, but he put his hard and gentle and briar-scratched hand on the back of the neck of Culafroy, who was about to kneel. Another day, three snakes were writhing around one another. Their heads were hooded in a little leather cowl which was tightened about the neck by a noose. "You can touch them, they won't do anything to you." Culafroy didn't move. Rooted with horror, he could no more have run away than at the apparition of a ghost or an angel from heaven. He could not turn his head away, the snakes fascinated him, and yet he felt that he was about to vomit. "So you're scared? Come on, admit it, I used to be too." It was not true, but he wanted to reassure him. Deliberately, calmly, sovereignly, Alberto put his hand into the tangle of reptiles, and took one out, a long thin one whose tail flattened, like a whipcord, though noiselessly, about his bare arm. "Touch it!" He spoke, and at the same time took the child's hand and put it on the cold, scaly body, but Culafroy tightened his fist, and only the joints came into contact with the snake. That wasn't touching. The coldness surprised him. It entered his vein and the initiation proceeded. Veils were falling before large, solemn tableaux which Culafroy's gaze could not make out. Alberto took another snake and put it on Culafroy's bare arm, about which it coiled just as the first had done. "You see, she's harmless." (Alberto spoke of snakes in the feminine, always.) The sensitive Alberto felt, like his penis swelling between his fingers, the mounting in the child of the emotion which stiffened him and made him shudder. And the insidious friendship for snakes was born. However, he had not touched any, that is, even grazed them with the organ of touch, the fingertips, the spot where the fingers are swollen with a tiny little sensitive bump, by means of which the blind read. Alberto had to open the boy's hand and slip the icy body into it. And that was the revelation. From that moment, it seemed to him that a people of snakes might have invaded him, climbed him and insinuated themselves within him without his feeling anything but a friendly joy, a kind of tenderness. But,

during this time, Alberto's sovereign hand had not left his, nor had even one of his thighs left the child's, and as a result he was no longer quite himself. Culafoy and Divine, who have delicate tastes, will always be forced to love what they abhor, and that constitutes a little of their sanctity, for that is renunciation.

Alberta taught him culling. You must wait for noon, when the snakes are asleep on the rocks, in the sun. You approach very quietly and then, crooking the index and middle finger, you grab them around the neck, right near the head, so that they neither bite nor slip away; then, rapidly, while they are hissing with despair, hood their head, tighten the noose and put them into the box. Alberto wore a pair of whipped corduroy pants, leggings and a grey shirt whose sleeves were rolled up to the elbows. He was handsome, as all the males in this book are handsome, powerful, and lithe and unaware of their grace. His hard, stubborn hair fell down over his eyes to his mouth, and that alone would have sufficed to endow him with glamour, a crowned glamour in the eyes of the pale curly-haired child. They generally met in the morning, around ten o'clock, near a granite cross. They chatted for a moment about girls, and left. The harvesting was not done. The rye and the metallic grains being inviolable by all others, they found sure shelter there. They entered obliquely, crept along, and all at once found themselves in the middle of the field. They stretched out on the ground and waited for noon. At first, Culafoy played with Alberto's arms, the next day with his legs, the next day with his member, and this memory delighted Divine, because she sees herself hollowing her cheeks like a boy who is whistling. Alberto violated the child everywhere until he himself collapsed with weariness.

One day Culafoy said, "I'm going home, Berto." "Going home? Well, see you this evening, Lou." Why "see you this evening?" The phrase came out of Alberto's mouth so spontaneously that Culafoy found it natural and replied, "See you this evening." However the day was over and they would see each other again only the following day and Alberto knew it. He smiled foolishly as he thought that a phrase had carelessly escaped him. As for Culafoy, he did not quite define to himself the meaning of this farewell. The phrase had overwhelmed him, as do certain ingenuous poems, whose logical and grammatical meaning appear to us only after we have enjoyed their charm. And Culafoy was out and out bewitched. In the slate house it was wash-day. On the drier in the garden the hanging sheets formed a labyrinth where spectres hovered. It was quite natural that Alberto would

wait there. But at what time? He had said nothing definite. The wind shook the white sheets the way the arm of an actress shakes a decor of painted canvas. Night thickened with its usual calmness and built a rigid architecture of broad planes, packed with shadow. Culafroy's walk started the moment the spherical and steaming moon mounted the sky. The drama was to be played there. Would Alberto come to burgle? For he needed money "for his chick," he said. He had a chick; hence he was a real cock. One day he had informed himself about the furnishing of the slate house. Culafroy liked the idea. He hoped that Alberto would also come for that. The moon was mounting the sky with a solemnity calculated to impress sleepless humans. A thousand noises which make up the silence of night pressed about the child, like a tragic chorus, with the intensity of the music of brasses and the unwontedness of houses of crime, and also of prisons where—horrors—one never hears the noise of a bunch of keys. Culafroy walked about barefooted, among the sheets. He lived minutes light as minutes, made up of anxiety and tenderness. He even ventured a toe dance, but the sheets, forming hanging partitions and corridors, the sheets, quiet and crafty as corpses, might, by coming together, have imprisoned and stifled him as is sometimes done by the branches of certain trees in warm countries to certain imprudent savages who rest in their shade. And if he no longer touched the ground except by an illogical movement of his tensed instep, this movement might make him take off, leave the earth and launch him amidst worlds from which he would never return, for in space nothing could stop him. So he placed his soles flat on the ground that they might hold him there more securely. For he knew how to dance. From a copy of *Screen Weekly*, he had snatched the following theme: "A little ballerina photographed in her ballet-skirt, her arms curved gracefully above her head, her toe, like a spear-head, rooted to the floor."

And below the picture, this caption: "The graceful Kitty Ruphlay, 12 years old." With a divinatory sense that was astonishing, this child, who had never seen a dancer, who had never seen a stage, or any actor, understood the page-long article that dealt with figures, *entrechats*, *jetés-battus*, ballet-skirts, toe-shoes, drop-footlights, ballet. By the look of the word Nijinsky (the rise of the N, the descent of the loop of the j, the leap of the hook of the k and the fall of the y, graphic form of a name which seems to want to draw the spring, with its bounds and rebounds on the boards, of the jumper who does not know which

leg to come down on,) he sensed the artist's lightness, as he will one day know that Verlaine can only be the name of a poet musician. He learned to dance by himself, as he had learned the violin by himself. Thus, he danced as he played. All his acts were served by gestures necessitated not by the act, but by the choreography which transforms his life to a perpetual ballet. He quickly succeeded in dancing on his toes, and he did it everywhere: in the wood-shed, while picking up sticks of wood, in the little barn, under the cherry tree . . . He would lay aside his sabots and dance on the grass in black wool slippers, his hand holding on to the low branches. He peopled the country-side with a multitude of figurines who chose to be dancers in white net skirts, but who remained, nonetheless, a pale schoolboy, in a black smock, looking for mushrooms or dandelions. He was greatly afraid of being discovered, and especially by Alberto. "What could I say to him then?" He thought about the kind of suicide that might save him, and he decided upon hanging. Let us get back to that night. He was astonished and startled at the slightest movement of the branches, at the slightest breath which was a bit dry. The moon rang out ten o'clock. Then came aching anxiety. In his heart and throat the child discovered jealousy. Now he was sure that Alberto would not come, that he would go and get drunk; and such was the idea of Alberto's betrayal that it established itself despotically in Culafroy's mind, so much that he declared: "My despair is immense." Generally, when he was alone, he had no need to utter his thoughts aloud, but today an intimate sense of the tragic orders him to observe an extraordinary protocol, and so he declares, "My despair is immense." He sniffled, but he did not cry. About him, the decor had lost its marvelously unreal appearance. Nothing had changed in its layout: there were still the same white sheets lying on the wire, which curved with the weight, the same star-spangled sky, but the meaning of it was different. The drama which was being enacted there had reached its pathetic phase, the *dénouement*: all that remained for the actor was to die. When I write that the meaning of the decor was no longer the same, I do not mean that the decor ever was for Culafroy (later on for Divine) anything other than it would have been for someone else, namely: wash drying on wire lines. He knew quite well that he was a prisoner of sheets, but I beg of you to see the marvelous in that: prisoner of familiar, though stiff, sheets in the moonlight,—unlike Ernestine who, thanks to them, would have imagined brocade hangings, or halls of a marble palace,

she who could not mount the step of a stairway without thinking of mounting the throne, and she would not have failed, in the same circumstances, to have a deep despair and to make the decor change function, to transform it to a white marble tomb, to magnify it in some way with her own grief, which was as lovely as a tomb, whereas for Culafroy nothing had moved, and this indifference of the decor signified (from sign) quite well its hostility. Each thing, each object, was the result of a miracle whose realization filled him with wonder. And also each gesture. He did not understand his room, nor the garden, nor the village. He understood nothing, not even that a stone was a stone, and this amazement in the face of what is—a decor which, sheerly by being, ended by no longer being—left him the writhing prey of primitive and simple emotions: grief, joy, pride, shame. . .

He fell asleep, like a drunken pierrot in the theatre, drooping in his baggy sleeves, on the grass and beneath the violent light of the moon. The next day he said nothing to Alberto. The fishing and the rest in the rye-field were what they were every noon. At night it had for a moment occurred to Alberto to come prowling about the slate house, his hands in his pockets and whistling (he whistled splendidly, with metallic stridencies, and his virtuosity was not the least of his charms. This whistling was magical. It bewitched the girls. The boys envied him, understanding his power. He may have charmed the snakes), but he did not come, for the town was hostile to him, especially if he went up at night, an evil angel. He slept.

They continued their love-making in the midst of snakes. Divine remembers that. She thinks that it was the most beautiful time of her life.

* * *

The vaults and the walls of the chapel of the Virgin are whitewashed, and the Virgin has an apron as blue as a sailor's summer collar.

Facing the faithful, the altar is well arranged; facing God, it is a wooden disorder in the dust and spider webs.

The purses of the usher taking up the collection are made of a pink silk left-over of the dress of Alberto's sister. But the things of the church became more familiar to him; soon, only the church of the neighboring town could compose more new spectacles for him. And gradually, it emptied itself of its gods, who fled at the child's approach. The last question he asked them

received an answer as sharp as a slap. One afternoon, the mason was repairing the porch of the chapel. Perched at the very top of a double ladder, he did not seem to Culafroy to be an archangel, for never could the child take seriously the marvelous of good image-makers. The mason was the mason. A handsome chap, moreover. His corduroy pants showed off his buttocks and hung loosely about his legs, and that is the height of masculine elegance. From the open-necked collar of his shirt, his neck emerged from stiff hairs, as a tree-trunk emerges from the fine grass of the undergrowth. The door of the church was open. Lou passed beneath the rungs of the ladder, he lowered his head and his eyes beneath a sky inhabited by a pair of ribbed corduroy pants and sneaked into the choir. The mason, who had seen him, said nothing. He was hoping that the kid would play some trick on the curé. Culafroy's sabots rattled against the flagstones until he reached the spot where they are covered with a carpet. He stopped beneath the chandelier and kneeled very ceremoniously on a tapestried prayer-stool. His genuflections and his gestures became the faithful copy of those executed every Sunday on that prayer-stool by Alberto's sister. He adorned himself with their beauty. Thus, acts have aesthetic and moral value only to the extent that those who accomplish them are endowed with power. And again I asked myself what is the significance of the emotion which manifests itself in me, before a silly song, as does meeting with a recognized masterpiece. This power is delegated to us sufficiently for us to feel it within us, and that makes it bearable for us to lower ourselves to get into an auto, because at the moment that we are lowering ourselves an imperceptible memory makes of us a star, or a king, or a vagrant (but he is still a king), who lowered himself in the same way (we saw him in the street or on the screen). Standing on my right toes and raising my right arm to take my little mirror from the wall or to grab my mess-tin from the shelves is a gesture which transforms me into the Princess de T . . . , whom I once saw make this movement in order to replace a drawing which she had shown me, and priests who again begin the symbolic gestures feel themselves penetrated with the virtue not of the symbol, but of the first executant, and the priest who buried Divine, repeating at the mass the sly gestures of theft and burglary, bedecked himself in the gestures, *spolia opima*, of a guillotined second-story man.

So no sooner had he drawn a few drops from the holy-water basin at the entrance than Germaine's hard breasts and buttocks

were grafted on to him (as at a later time muscles were grafted on), and he had to carry them in the fashion of the day. Then he prayed, by position and murmur, accentuating the inclination of the head and the noble slowness of the sign of the cross. Shadowy calls, shadowy clarions came from all corners of the choir, from all the stalls of the altar. The little lamp gleamed; at noon, it was seeking a man. The mason whistling under the porch was of the world, of Life and Lou, alone here, felt himself master of the great bazaar. To answer clarion calls, to go into the shadows as full as a solid . . . He arose, silent, (his sabots alighted before he did and bore him with infinite precautions over the tufted wool of the carpet), and the odor of its incense, venomous as that of old tobacco in a well-caked pipe, as a lover's breath, insensitized the fears which were born thick and fast with each of his gestures. He moved with slowness, with tired muscles, soft as a diver's, numbed by that odor which pushed back the moment so well that Culafroy seemed to be neither there nor today. The altar was suddenly within arm's reach, as if Lou had quite unaware taken a giant's stride, and he felt he was a sacrilege. The Epistles were face down on the stone table. The silence was a particular, present silence which the outside noises did not break through. They crashed on the thick walls of the church like rotten fruit thrown by kids, and if they were heard, they in no way disturbed the silence. "Cula!" The mason was calling. "Sh! Don't yell in church." This exchange made an immense crevice in the edifice of the silence, the silence of cottages that are being robbed. The double curtains of the tabernacle were badly joined, and the slit, obscene as an unbuttoned fly, let the little key which kept the door closed stick out. Culafroy's hand was on the key, when he came back to his senses only to lose them again immediately. The miracle! The blood is supposed to flow from the hosts if I take one! Stories of Jews told heedlessly, of sacrilegious Jews, biting the Holy Species, stories of prodigies, where hosts, falling from the tongues of children, stain the flagstones and cloths with blood, stories of simoniacal brigands have prepared this little moment of anguish. It can not be said that Lou's heart beat louder, on the contrary—a kind of digitalis (digitalis is called Virgin's-finger in those parts) slowed down its cadence and its force,—nor that his ears buzzed, the silence came from them. A wild silence. On tiptoe, he had found the key. He was no longer breathing. The miracle. He expected to see the plaster statues come tumbling down from their niches and crush him; he was certain they would do so; for

himself, it was already done before being done. He awaited damnation with the resignation of the man condemned to death, and, knowing it imminent, he awaited it in peace. Thus, he acted only after the virtual accomplishment of the act. The silence (it was squared, cubed) was on the point of blowing up the church, of making fireworks of God's things. The ciborium was there. Therefore he had it, and the act seemed to him so extraordinary that he was curious enough to watch himself accomplish it. The dream almost collapsed. Lou-Culafoy seized the three hosts and dropped them on the carpet. They descended hesitantly, drifting like leaves that fall in calm weather. The silence flung itself at him, bowled him over as a flock of boxers might have done, pinned his shoulders to the floor. He let go of the ciborium, which, falling on the wool, emitted a hollow sound.

And the miracle occurred. There was no miracle. God had been debunked. God was hollow. Only a hole with any old thing around it. A pretty form, like the plaster head of Marie Antoinete and the little soldiers, which were holes with a little thin lead around them.

* * *

Nobility is wondrous. The most equalitarian of men, even though he may not want to admit it, experiences this wondrousness and submits to it. Two attitudes are possible in regard to it: humility or arrogance, which are both explicit recognition of its power, and this power is secular, thus profound, nocturnal. Titles are sacred. The sacred surrounds us and enslaves us. It is the submission of flesh to flesh. For example, the Church is sacred. Its slow rites, weighed down with gold like Spanish galleons, ancient in meaning, quite far from spirituality, give it as earthly an empire as that of beauty and that of nobility. And Culafoy of the light body, unable to escape this potency, abandoned himself to it voluptuously (as he would have done to Art, had he known it). The nobility has names as heavy and strange as those of snakes (already as difficult as the names of old, lost divinities), strange as signs and escutcheons where venerated animals (totems of old families, war-cries, titles, furs, enamels),—escutcheons which closed up the family with a secret, as a signet seals a parchment, an epitaph a tomb. It charmed the child. His procession in the time (indistinct and yet certain, and present) of rough warriors, of which he was (he thought himself) the culmination, thus themselves,—a procession whose only reason for being had been to arrive at the following result:

a pale child, prisoner of a village of thatched cottages, moved him more than an actual and visible procession of weather-beaten soldiers, of whom he might have been chief. But he was not noble. Nobody in the village was noble, at any rate nobody bore the traces of nobility. But one day, among the rubbish in the attic, he found an old history by Capefigue. A thousand names of barons and knights at arms were entered there, but he saw only one: Picquigny. Ernestine's maiden name was Picquigny. No doubt about it, she was noble. Here is the passage from the *Constitutional and Administrative History of France* by M. Capefigue (page 447): ". . . A preparatory and secret meeting of the Estates, held by Marcel and the municipal magistrates of Paris. Furthermore, this is how it was carried out. Jean de Picquigny and several other men at arms, burghers of Amiens, planted ladders at the foot of the walls and surprised the guards, whom they did not harm . . ." In order to have precise details about his family, he read all through Capefigue's history (and, had they been available to him, he would have ransacked libraries, deciphered books of gramarye, and that is how learned vocations are born), but he discovered nothing but that islet emerging from a sea of wondrous names. But then why did not Ernestine have a nobiliary particle in her name? And where was her coat of arms? Indeed, what was her coat of arms? Did Ernestine know of this passage in the book and of her own nobility? Had he been less young and dreamy, Culafroy would have noticed that the corner of page 447 was rubbed away by the sweat of fingers. Ernestine's father knew the book. The same miracle had opened it to the same place and had shown him the name. It pleased Culafroy that the nobility belonged to Ernestine rather than himself, and in this trait we may already see a sign of his destiny. To be able to approach her, to enjoy her intimacy, her special favors, suited him, as many are more pleased to be the favorite of the prince than the prince himself. or the priest of a god than the god, for in this way he can receive Grace. He could not keep himself from telling of his discovery, and, not knowing with Ernestine how to tackle the question, he said to her outright, "You're noble. I saw your name in an old history of France." And he smiled ironically, to give an impression of scorn for that aristocracy whose vanity the school-master spoke of sumptuously whenever our studies led us to the night of August fourth. Culafroy thought that scorn indicates indifference. Children, and her own child first, intimidated Ernestine almost as much as a servant intimidates me; she blushed

and thought she was found out; or thought she was found out and blushed, I don't know. She too wished herself noble, and she had put the same question to her father, who blushed in the same way. This History must have been in the family for a long time, taking, as well as possible, the role of title of nobility, and perhaps it was Ernestine who, exhausted by a too numerous imagination which made of her a wretched countess, one or several marchionesses heavy with blazons and crowns, had relegated it to the attic, far away from her, to escape its magic; but she did not know that by placing it above her head she would never be able to liberate herself from it, the only effective means being to bury it in very rich earth, or to drown it, or burn it. She did not reply, but, could he have read within her, Culafroy would have seen the ravages wrought there by that unrecognized nobility alone, of which she was uncertain and which, in her eyes, put her above the villagers and city tourists. She described the blazon. For now she was familiar with heraldry. She had gone right to Paris to ferret in d'Hozier. She had learned History there. As we were saying, scholars hardly act otherwise or from other motives. The philologist does not admit (moreover, he knows nothing about it) that his taste for etymology comes from the poetry (so he thinks, or may think, for it is a carnal potency which incites him) contained in the word "slave" (*esclave*), wherein are found, if he likes, the word "key" (*clé*) and the word "knees" (*genoux*). It is because he one day learns that the female of the scorpion devours her male that the young man becomes an entomologist, and another becomes a historian when he comes to know that Frederick the Second of Germany made children be brought up in solitude. Ernestine tried to avoid the shame of this admission (her lust for nobility) by the swift admission of a less infamous sin. This ruse is old: the ruse of partial admissions. Spontaneously I admit a little, in order to be better able to screen the most grave. The examining-magistrate told my lawyer that if I were putting on an act, it was a great one: but I wasn't putting it on from the beginning of the investigation to the end. I multiplied the errors of defence and it was lucky I did. The court-clerk looks as if I were simulating ingenuity, mother of blunders. The judge seems rather to grant that I am sincere. They are both wrong. It is true that I point out compromising details which they were unaware of at first. (I repeatedly said, "It was at night," a circumstance aggravating my case, as the judge told me, but thinking also that a crafty delinquent would not have admitted that: thus,

I must have been a novice. Now, it was in the judge's chambers that it occurred to me to say that "it was at night," for, regarding that night I had details to hide. I had already thought about adorning the accusation with a new offense, night-time, but, as I had left no trace, I attached no importance to it. Then the importance sprouted and grew—I don't know why—and I said mechanically, "At night," mechanically, but insistently. But, at a second interrogation, I suddenly understood that I am not confusing the facts and dates sufficiently. I calculate and foresee with a rigor which disconcerts the judge. It's too clever. I have only my own affair to be preoccupied with: he has twenty. So he questions me—not sure what he should ask me, had he been shrewder or had more time, and to which I have anticipated answers—but sure of the rather coarse details, over which I had not stopped, because I had not imagined that a judge might think of them.) Ernestine did not have enough time to invent a crime; she described the coats of arms: "It's argent and azure of ten pieces, over all a lion gules membered and langued, on the crest, Melusina." It was the arms of the Lusignans. Culafroy listened to this splendid poem. Ernestine had at her fingertips the history of this family, which numbered kings of Jerusalem and princes of Cyprus. Their Breton castle was supposed to have been built by Melusina, but at that Ernestine did not pause: it was in the legend, and her mind, in order to build the unreal, wanted solid materials. Legend is hollow. She did not believe in fairies, creatures fabricated to divert dreamers of audacious gladness from their straight path, but her great excitements came to her with the reading of a historical phrase: "The Outre-Mer branch . . . The arms that sing . . ."

She knew she was lying. Seeking to make herself illustrious by an ancient lineage, she succumbed to the call of the night, the earth and the flesh. She sought for herself. She wanted to feel, trailing it at her feet, the dynastic force, which was brutal, muscular fecundating. In short, the heraldic figures appropriately illustrated it.

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*AT ALL TIMES IT IS GOOD
TO PRAISE THE SHINING EARTH*

Edward Field

At all times lies she bosomy there,
Lubricious to all intrusions;
The twig, the finger, the penis share
A probe in her affections;

Never complaining when the rejected
Play their frustrate passions on her thighs
After the door they wished to enter
Squeezed coyly shut on the quivering nostrils.

Will take all comers and bear unto each
Beautiful children guaranteed
Not to grow into monsters
Who relish the flesh of their fathers.

And especially now when all other lovers
Are acting slut-like, pulling hair,
The beautiful mouth a lipstick smear,
And the skeletons are clattering from cupboards;

At this time may we creep away
From the arena of the torn and dirty slip
To where she lies full-bosomed
Inviting us to passion or to sleep.

NIGHT GROPING

Joseph Shore

To the dances of Kohana.

THOSE awful mechanical rabbits. They seemed real, wound with some clever mechanism, set to move with warm rabbit motions when you touched them. You could feel the frames under their fur, like soft rabbit bones, just in the right places, the little shoulders, the sutured skulls, with the eye cavities. I went to the big table to cut more cheese and bread for the guests, and there they were, pushing against the knife, against my hands, when I tried to work on the bread board, with their turgid animal contractions, responding just like real. Four or six of them.

They weren't small, they were quite large, and a couple even jumped down to the floor and hopped about with their fuzzy brushes flicking and their cute pink ears flapping. And the guests laughed.

I whispered to her that it wasn't quite right. Cats, or dogs . . . but mechanical rabbits, and so many of them! It wasn't really bad taste, I didn't want her to think I'd start running her life for her if she married me, but . . . she could see for herself, the guests were laughing. What those things must have cost! She said she was extravagant, couldn't really give me what I wanted, but then I couldn't give her what she wanted either, if she were extravagant, not money, only love.

I whispered that it could lead to anything, to perversion, to strange androgyne idols, with beautiful female breasts and male organs, or with fine male muscles and female organs. I whispered that the next step could be anything, inversion, vampirism. She whispered, it isn't polite to whisper in company, the guests are laughing.

I hastened to pass the cheese and bread. The guests laughed with pleasure at my acting, they said. How cleverly I portrayed

fear when I touched the rabbits. I even went pale. Very talented. Very entertaining. When would I do my famous stunts?

Entertain them, entertain them, she whispered. How long do you think they can be amused by your mechanical rabbits? My mechanical rabbits? Your fear of mechanical rabbits, she whispered. Go on, show them your wonderful, your startling ability, not even I know how you do it . . . strange that you can't make money with it.

And yet, she insisted that she wouldn't marry me because she couldn't give me what I needed. . . The guests must be entertained. I know my dear. It's really easy to look into people's souls and tell them all about themselves. The astonishing, the amusing part is that they recognize themselves, they actually recognize a true portrait of themselves. The cards, the palm lines, the tea leaves are only prop to make it look less easy than it really is. All you need to do is look deep into people's eyes and concentrate hard, and there it is, their inner self. What I can't understand is that with you, whom I love, it doesn't quite work, doesn't quite come out. . .

I did my best to be clever and the guests appreciated it. The shrewd ones liked to be told they were shrewd, and the dumb ones that they were dumb. The ones who were listening enjoyed it hugely. The thieves liked being told they were thieves, the mean ones that they were mean, the naive ones that they were dupes. Of course, all that told them tactfully, but a true portrait, clearly drawn, which they liked more than anything else in the world. More, more, they wanted, do it with leaves of strange herbs, with the Taro deck, with nail parings, with the entrails of birds! I had a true showman's idea! I would do it with the entrails of the mechanical rabbits!

I had to apologize to the guests because she wouldn't let me cut open her expensive rabbits. She couldn't afford to ruin such expensive toys, I could understand that very well, but, naturally, I had to give the guests a different reason, that I couldn't draw conclusions about live things, people, by examining the entrails of mechanical toys. They laughed.

You see how I amuse your friends, darling. It is very important for a husband to be liked by his wife's friends. Only, what will your strange fancy make them think about why you have me around? You could keep me very nicely for what those rabbits cost you. How will they think I must entertain you? They might think I do the strangest things to you, the queerest perversions, mechanical toys to tickle the recesses of your feel-

ing, all sorts of apparatus. A woman with such fancies is insatiable, they'll say to each other, she could demand the queerest refinements.

Two of the furry machines jumped to sit with her. She played with them and the guests watched. How could she be stroking them, feeling the gristly frames under the soft rabbit fur, the little skulls built up so well? I saw that she was trying to do her share to amuse her friends because I forgot playing host for a moment.

I hastened to the big table to cut more cheese, to make canapes, to pour champagne, sherry, brandy, all set on a tray and offered to each guest one by one. That is how I honor your friends, my dear, each with a special little indulgence. Yes, of course, I must entertain them more, better than before. I shall surpass myself, never fear, I know the secret. They want to see themselves in the future, a little hedging on immortality. It is easy. If one can look into their eyes and see their inner selves, any fool can tell what they'll be like in ten, twenty, one hundred years. See, I throw away the tea leaves, the Taro deck, the nail parings. . .

To Vivita Gitana, with cancer of the left breast, one hundred years of contentment. To Blunderius Alabanzene, with stones in the kidney, fifty years of health and wealth. To Devil O'Grady, who doesn't know his appendix is about to pop, gaiety and hard drinking for fifty years. To John McSatan, who'll live long for sticking to good liquor, fifty extra years. To Difrita Copernicus, who forgets faster than she learns, the discovery of a new disease named after her, and a hundred years of life beyond her death next year. To Beowulf B. O'Wolfe, fame everlasting as a poet of two-word odes, and a hundred extra years. To each of the unnamed guests, fifty extra years, and more to some. They were enthralled.

My dear, please, I whispered, if you like me, if only because I love you, please stop playing with these mechanical rabbits as if they were children. It is awful to cuddle them like that. I could understand a strange perversion, if you have locked in your closet a giant eunuch with marvelous hands, or a subtle Lesbian with glowing eyes, but not this mauling of the mechanical rabbits, not cooing and petting as if they were children.

But these can't be children, she whispered. They're only my rabbits, my soft little rabbits, my own little babies. Now they've run away! The guests were polite and left.

She lay on the bed rigid and tight lipped. And tight limbed even when I touched her. Of course, I had whispered too much, but the guests were amused and had gone out of politeness. And you must admit, dear, that there is a love between us like the groping of roses, writhing triumphant. Look!

The rabbits jumped on the bed and sat in a furry row, staring. We have drawn the inanimate rabbits, I exclaimed, our love can order the world! True, I can't expect to amuse you as well as the others, something I can't understand. But for you I could make the supreme effort, perhaps with the entrails of mechanical rabbits. . .

Look again! Those rabbits are real! That is why the guests were laughing. Can't you see, I have nothing to give you, no children, no segment of time, only my rabbits.

But I do not want children, or time, or rabbits. Only you, the moment with you everlasting.

Not what you want, what I want to give you and can't.

Is that why I feel so lost and lonely?

That is why.

THE ART OF ARTHUR G. DOVE

Duncan Phillips

"When the professional artists transform Academies into associations of private interest surrounded by a servile multitude, Art can do nothing but take refuge in a few solitary hearts."

—ELIE FAURE

ARTHUR G. DOVE was one of the few lyrical individualists among the many contemporary painters of abstraction. His paintings are visual poetry, or, more accurately, visual music. It is difficult to communicate in words a sense of their distinction and delight. One cannot analyze Dove as one can the cerebral theorists and the diagrammatic designers. His art is as different from the spatially geometrical Cubists and from the precisely proportioned Purists as it is from the complicated literary painters of Surrealism. He was never theoretical, never literary, never anything but painterly and sincere.

Nevertheless his whole life was changed when, in Paris, he discovered that the potentialities of abstract pattern would enable him to create plastic equivalents to "various conditions of light," and to the interesting variety of shapes and textures to be found anywhere. The intrinsic character of each object challenged him to a lyrical metamorphosis in which its essence persisted.

After graduation from Cornell, Dove won immediate success illustrating fiction for magazines. A chance encounter with Stieglitz and the famous gallery at 291, following his discovery of Picasso, Braque and Gris, and especially of their "collages," decided his destiny. He would work on a farm far away from gallery distractions, close to nature and the elements. And he would find a rural environment which would be his research laboratory and his haven of creative independence. All his inspiration as an artist would be drawn from his simple life close to the soil and the stars. This design for living was undertaken

and sustained against stern parental antagonism and persistent public indifference. The liberating sponsorship of Stieglitz, with the chance to show his progress once a year for the few who understood and cared and purchased, was all that he needed. There were years when his labors on the farm, in the midst of barns and animals, along the furrows of ploughed earth, alert to the transformations of the seasons, caused his painting to approach a luminous whimsical expressionism. His spontaneity at that period was not only of the mind and the point of view, but technical no less, since he had no time for lovingly prepared canvasses and protracted labor to fulfill his fantasy. When in later years he had to live a sedentary life because of an ailing heart, his art became more and more that of the visionary and the inspired craftsman. We think of him now as one of the great American Solitaries, as we think of Thoreau by Walden Pond or of Ryder, the hermit of downtown Manhattan.

John Dewey has written that "the truly spontaneous in art is complete absorption in subject matter that is fresh." There are many spontaneous technicians who have nothing original in their point of view, nothing of any consequence to convey, only their virtuosity in facile exploitation of their particular instrument. There are also great artists whose absorption in a fresh new world of their own making is so complete that their mental and emotional spontaneity in response to experience can be lightly sketched but must later on be painstakingly and lovingly rendered in subtle and beautiful textures until the inevitable forms and colors required by the inner eye have been realized in perfected relations. Only little children for whom all the world is new can paint as the bird sings. Of course there are the winged moments of the best expressionists from Tintoretto to Van Gogh and Marin. But, once again to quote Dewey, "man is not a bird and even his most spontaneous outbursts if expressive are not momentary." Dove had freshness of vision always but only on rare occasions had he technical spontaneity. More often his resourcefulness and exquisite craftsmanship were none the less immersed and integrated with his freshness of subject for being both deliberate and painstaking.

Dove was American to the core of his being with something of the self-reliant character of the pioneer. There is something also of the North American Indian in his big bold patterns with ornamental detail and his intimate awareness of sun and moon, trees and winds and the cycles of life and death in nature. The universality of his Americanism in contemplation of the elemental

should be a sobering corrective to our topical regionalists. In his spontaneously conceived and joyously executed designs—the aesthetic form, the poetic concept or caprice and the material substance or texture all are one. Each canvas has its own magic of color and surface, its own rightness in adapting exceptional means to unique ends. There was no preciousity in his craftsmanship for Dove was as full of gusto in his earthy or cosmic acceptance of life as Walt Whitman. Add to the list of great Americans—Arthur G. Dove.

NOTES ON THE ILLUSTRATIONS

RAIN OR SNOW

Columns of silver leaf, as symbols of ice and snow, are dazzling when seen opposite the light, darkened in tone when the light is from the side. The silvery sheen or shadow dramatizes the movement of white and gray tinted papers in planes which turn and float and fall in the slanting rain. Brown branches traverse the crystal space.

REMINISCENCE

This is a memory of the north woods and its lakes, of wind-blown tree tops, of storm clouds shaped in the artist's mind to the silhouette of the moose from the adjoining shores. A child's kite rides the gale.

GOLDEN STORM

Dove apprehends spirit through substance. In *Golden Storm* an opening of the sky gleams with a dust of gold leaf applied directly to a block of unpolished wood. Cloud and earth forms with coppery lights overhang black waves which toss in agitation. Blue-green grasses bend in the blast.

FLOUR MILL ABSTRACTION

In his Flour Mill Arthur Dove made a Chinese "character" out of square, modulated brush strokes of pure color—yellow, deep blue, brown and black on white. It is a chromatic calligraphy of vibrant and dynamic power which symbolizes a condition of intense light at an exciting moment of time. It communicates the exhilaration of sunshine at high noon, of gleaming chimneys with smoke, and of sun drenched factory walls with cast shadows. The source of the technic might be traced back to a memory of the Kandinsky of 1912 when his improvisations were in colored shapes of dark and light brush marks, the sum of which was a high powered landscape-abstraction. Dove had grown beyond explosive pyrotechnics. His arabesque has not only movement but a certain majesty. This is a return of the abstract symbol into the original impression until the two are one.

ELECTRIC PEACH ORCHARD

A depiction of electricity in the air and a fanciful imagery of winter trees with twigs to send out messages.

COWS IN PASTURE

The heavy sluggish shapes, the bone whites and rusty b'acks, the mossy greens and browns, suggest cows huddled in a pasture, their hind quarters comfortably settled into congenial soil. The lazy lines suggest the slow drowsy ruminations. Animals too have their stream of consciousness.



RAIN OR SNOW



REMINISCENCE



GOLDEN STORM



FLOUR MILL



ELECTRIC PEACH ORCHARD



COWS IN PASTURE

